

AMBER STAR <sup>AND</sup>  
FAIR HALF-DOZEN





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

---

Chap. .... Copyright No. ....

Shelf <sup>PZ3</sup> ~~D557~~ A

---

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



Library















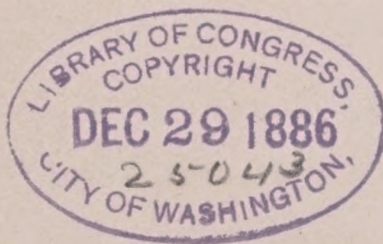
THE AMBER STAR

AND

A FAIR HALF-DOZEN.

BY

MARY LOWE DICKINSON.



NEW YORK:  
PHILLIPS & HUNT.

CINCINNATI:  
CRANSTON & STOWE.

1886.



PZ3  
D557A

Copyright, 1886, by  
**PHILLIPS & HUNT,**  
NEW YORK.



# THE AMBER STAR.

---

## CHAPTER I.

“THERE! I’ll leave ye father’s old crutches, and if you want any thing, jest thump on the wall. I’ve the supper to git for the hired men:” and the speaker set down the tray with a bang, and backed toward the door. The invalid’s wistful eyes followed her, as if she might have asked something had time been given to speak; and perhaps Hannah Wilde felt their mute appeal, for her tall, lank figure lingered a moment on the threshold.

“Don’t want nothin’ now, I s’pose, do ye? Say quick, if ye do; for I’ve left the kittle on, and water’ll be b’ilin’ all over the stove, fust thing ye know.”

“No, no, I will not keep you, Hannah; I only wish you ever could stop long enough to sit down. It is hard to see you always at work, while I must sit with folded hands.”

“Well, sick folks ginerally aint very smart to work, and ought to be thankful if they aint oblceged to.



If ever I do set down a spell, I'm more beat out than when I keep a-goin'. Settin' agrees with some; lucky it don't with me, for it does seem's if the men-folks Loren hires in harvestin' would eat us outer house and home! It's one woman's work to keep 'em in vittles!"

"You ought to have some one to help you, Hannah," said a voice behind her, and a young man of about twenty-eight years of age, clad in blue woolen frock and overalls, the working garb of the farmer, appeared at the door.

"Goodness! Loren, are you done work a'ready? Now, that's just the way! Here I stand gabblin', till there pours in on to me a whole passel o' men-folks, and I haint so much as chopped the hash! Guess I can stir up a mess o' slap-jacks 'bout's quick as any thing." And away she bustled, to create such a hurricane in the kitchen as set the fire crackling, the pots and kettles rattling, and glass and china fairly bouncing from shelf to table.

Before the door that shut her into the kitchen had given its aggressive bang, the young man had reached the invalid's side, and stood looking tenderly down upon her pale face.

"You wanted something, mother, that Hannah forgot to bring; what was it?"

"O no, dear, I didn't ask for any thing; she was in



such a hurry, I didn't like to hinder her; but I would like the chair by the window before sunset: I want to see the light."

He did not wait for her to cease speaking before he laid a strong, steady hand upon the old-fashioned sofa, and moved it noiselessly toward the window, brought pillows from the bed, spread a shawl as dexterously as a woman could have done it, and then came and gathered the frail little woman up in his arms, and laid her tenderly upon the couch, just where her lifted eyes could see the glory of the western sky! He did not withdraw his arms, but knelt on the floor beside her, and scanned her face anxiously as she lay quite content, lifting now and then, as a loving child might have done, her thin hand to caress his sunburnt cheek.

The likeness between the faces was very plainly traced, as they sat thus, his brown curly hair almost touching her silver locks. Hannah said "he was most all mother;" and the clear grey eyes and the sensitive mouth were certainly an inheritance from her; while the sturdy breadth of shoulders and stalwart strength of limb came, to use Hannah's phrase again, "from t'other side o' the house." And Hannah was doubtless right. The working power that made him as patient and almost as silent a burden-bearer as his own oxen, that forced the hard soil of



his native hills to be more gracious to him than to his neighbors, was characteristic of his race. Hannah possessed them, too; but the difference of a quarter of a century in their respective ages was enough, perhaps, to account for the difference in brother and sister. He worked, and was silent. She worked, and complained as much as she liked. Yet she could not have been made to cease working; and he would gladly have given it up any day of the ten years since his father died, and he was summoned to take charge of the farm. He was a boy of eighteen then, teaching his first school to earn money to help him to what Hannah called "book le'rnin." Of what it cost to give up the thought of a life and world beyond the farm, that he might keep the home for his gentle mother and his half-sister, he had never said as many words as Hannah said at any one time when the hired men tramped over a clean floor, or a thunder shower soured the milk, or the setting hens hid their nests. She lived to get the work done, groaned that she had it to do, yet was "all beat out" if she had to sit still.

When she grumbled, Lorenzo often suggested a servant; but she resisted, sometimes tincturing her refusal with remarks "that the more women-folks in a house the more work and worry as a gin'ral thing. If they are blood relations, they must put up with



one another, whether or no ; but if not, one woman in a house is enough, that's what I always tho't, and I haint no reason yit to change my mind." So Loren had learned to let her alone, except when like remarks were made in his mother's hearing ; and then, the way he looked and spoke to her would have dispelled any delusion that he belonged to the weaker side of the house. Still, his arms could not lay down their daily burden, to rear a great bulwark of tender strength and protective love between the frail mother and the harder nature of his sister ; nor could his watchful care prevent his mother's state of nervous apology for being ill and idle, and, therefore, to Hannah a burden and care. True, this was the home to which her husband had brought her from the peace and stillness of her Quaker brother's house, the Forest Farm, five miles away beyond the Franconia hills ; and he had left her the right to be there till she died, when the farm was to belong to Hannah, the daughter of his former marriage, and to Loren, her only son. Timid, shrinking, and gentle, she had often felt herself a usurper, even in stronger days, when she could take her full share of household work and care.

In the home Hannah had been mistress before her father's new wife came, and she continued to be mistress still ; and she might even have forgiven the



new comer for becoming her father's wife, had she been made of stuff which could do battle. But the crowning aggravation of her intrusion was the gentleness that would bear and forbear; but would neither quarrel nor resist.

So, having no antagonist, Hannah's aggressive nature had to fight her work. To it she gave her strength and time, resolved to drive her step-mother from the realm of labor, by leaving nothing to be done. Up before day, getting the scrubbing, cooking, churning, so nearly done, that when the feeble woman took her place, Hannah was ready with, "'Taint no use botherin' round now; ought ter bin at it hours ago if you really meant to help."

"But I did not know that you meant to do it to day, Hannah—"

"Waal, I didn't know myself, mebbe! When one thing's done, I take hold of the next one; I don't lose time, calkerlaten to do things; I jest do 'em." So between Hannah's scorn of her step-mother's ways, and her husband's utter blindness as to the true condition of things, the little woman made slow progress toward being mistress of her home. Deacon Wilde felt himself the charm of the gentler tones and more refined speech of his young wife, and missed something, he scarce knew what, from the manner of his strong-willed daughter. He felt one as a sweeter



influence than the other; but he did not at all know why. "People wouldn't turn out alike, no more than trees," he said, "even if they were planted in the same soil;" and there he left it. If his kind old heart held any secret hope that Hannah would be softened by his wife's sweet ways, he was disappointed. While secretly she liked them, she yet called all amenities of speech and manners so many "airs," attempts to be better than common folk.

But when the baby Loren came, for a time there was a change. In her secret heart there was nothing, there never had been any thing, which the woman loved better than that boy. If the mother could have carried her conciliatory spirit so far as to have gone to heaven, all the warped and twisted fibers of genuine womanly and motherly nature would have straightened out and made Hannah a true and loving mother to the little one. But Mrs. Wilde not only did not die, but the quiescent and passive wife and house-mistress proved strong as any queen in defense of the divine rights of motherhood. It was she who nursed and fed and taught and reared her boy, growing strong for his sake; and finding in him the nourishment for her own hungering life; dowering him richly with all the checked and hoarded vitality of her thought and love. They knew each other



without words, and were enough for each other, through all his early years.

But this oneness in them, though she was forced to submit to it, was not easy for Hannah to bear. She had never forgiven his mother for being her father's wife; she found it harder to forgive her for being the mother of the boy. She loved her baby brother with a suppressed, savage, and jealous love; for she was over thirty years old, and had never loved any thing before. Yet she would not let the mother know how the boy possessed her heart. When he pleaded to go away to a better school than the village afforded, it was Hannah who stoutly opposed it, on the ground of needless expense, hardly conscious that her true reason was that she could not bear to miss him from the house. Yet, when he undertook to teach, to supply himself with means for study, she secretly put into the corners of his trunk all the money which she had been able to hoard. And when, later, the father died, and the boy came home to take his parent's place, poor Hannah's comfort in the sorrow was, "that now Lorenzo could not go out of her sight."

Then, when the long, slow invalidism, under which the mother was wasting, came; when Hannah saw them together, hand to hand and cheek to cheek, as she did to-night, when she sent to call Loren to supper—if her heart gave a great jealous, triumphant throb,



in anticipation of a day when she should have him all to herself—she did not reproach herself, but inwardly “thanked her stars that she had taken up her cross, as it were, and done her duty” by the sick woman all these many years.

Loren was very silent at table, but Hannah saw deep shadows in his eyes. He did not go out, as usual, to take a last look at the cattle, and to feed his favorite horse; but turned again to his mother’s room, and took the old place at her side.



## CHAPTER II.

THE farm was two miles from the village, whose white church spire rose clear against the evening sky. Its acres spread along the slopes, with the forest crowning the hill behind it, and making a background for the old gray house, now gray as the moss-grown rocks in the pasture land below. Around, on the neighboring hills, stood farm-houses, like his own, more or less touched with the frosts of time. And away beyond the village and the valley rose the forest-crowned mountains of the Franconia range; and farther distant, and higher still, the Presidential peaks, with Mount Washington lifting its bare head bravely to the clouds. It was a fair picture, with this sunset light pouring in great waves over the corn-fields, whose dry stacks stood erect, as if a row of sentinels, set to guard the golden treasure of pumpkins at their feet. The green of the grassy slopes had faded to a soft and velvet-like gray; solitary maples stood out here and there, flaming like torches alight on the hill-sides; and the nearer forests were all ablaze with the bronze of the oaks, and the gold of the birches, mingled with the dark foliage of the pines.



The patch of woods between them and the valley was a glowing mosaic of color, and far away the tree-tops on the mountain-sides seemed, through the soft autumn haze, fairly to glow and burn. Over the somber gorge of Lafayette a silver cloud hung low, and lingered, as if it could not bear to leave one shadowy spot untouched. Mother and son watched the familiar picture, as they had often done; but tonight the wistful eyes could not bear to lose one golden gleam. She watched the hills, but Loren watched her face.

“Are you not feeling as well as usual, dear mother?”

“Yes, darling; but the day has been so beautiful, and I have lost so much of it, that it seems hard to take my eyes one moment from the hills.”

“But why do you lose the hours at the window, if the hills are so much to you, mother dear?”

She only said, “I think I am growing covetous of all the beautiful things. The autumn never was so fair, and each day I feel may be the last.”

“O, mother! don’t say that!” and he bent his head over her hand, and kissed it fervently; “you are certainly better these October days.”

“Yes, my son; but the November winds and frosts are near. The trees are brighter, but they will fade and wither all the same.”



“Don’t let us speak of it, mother. I cannot meet what life will be without you.”

“And yet, I must speak of it, Loren. There are many things I want to say to you, and I am strong enough to talk to-night, and I do not like to speak, feeling you are unwilling to hear.”

A little shiver ran through the young man’s frame, but he said softly, as he lifted her a little on the pillows: “Well, dear mother, let us talk now in the dark, and you shall tell me every thing you wish me to do.”

“I only want you to do what will make you happy, dear.”

“Happy !” he said, under his breath ; “as if I could be happy.”

“Perhaps not at first, Loren ; I know I have been closer to you than mothers often are, and you to me have been all my life’s joy. But I should be sorry to think all joy would go out of life with me. Something will come to you—something has come already, Loren. You love Esther very dearly, do you not ?”

“Yes, mother, I love her—God knows that !”

“And she loves you, Loren ?”

“Sometimes I have hoped so, mother ;” still with the head bent down.

A sudden noise on the porch, under the window, startled him. He leaned forward, and looked out.



It was only Hannah who had been sitting on the step by the front door. Had she heard him? He had not time to conjecture, for his mother went on: "But you have not spoken?"

"No, I have not spoken—and—and I doubt if I ever shall! I have nothing to offer her, mother—no home but this, and this, without you in it, to love her and make her welcome."

A spasm of pain crossed the mother's face, which Loren did not see; pain—all mother-hearts know it—at her powerlessness to spare her child. She caressed his hair a moment with her hand before she spoke again. At last she said, softly: "Perhaps Hannah will sell her share of the farm, Loren."

"There's not the faintest chance of that, mother! It's the only spot she loves, and she was born here. And the farm came to father through her mother, we must remember. I should have no right to ask her to give it up. I used to hope that I could make a life elsewhere, and leave my share to her." He paused, and his mother finished the sentence for him.

"But it's late to begin a new life, you think, and it would be years before you could make a new home. Hannah has nothing with which to buy your half of the farm; you nothing, if you give it to her. Besides, what could she do with it, without you to care for it, my son? Yet, Loren, I doubt if we



old women had any right to use your young fresh life as we have done. I can't help hoping some way will open to another field for you—but—but if it does not—if you continue to make this your home, then—”

“Then I must never ask Esther to share it.”

Both were silent; both accepted the bitter fact. The mother was first to speak. “No, Loren; much as it hurts me to say it, yet I do say, you must not bring another woman here, to live the life that I have lived. Your sister must never be displaced again. She is too old to bear it, even as well as she bore it before. No joy would compensate for the wretchedness of the daily life. She would not mean it. She would not know it, perhaps; but she would none the less worry one's life away.”

“I know it, mother—I know it,” said Loren, bitterly. “I do not see of what my father could have been thinking when he brought you here.”

“He meant it well,” said the mother, sadly; “he did not understand. But you do, my darling; and you would spare any one you loved!”

“Yes, mother, I promise you, I will never ask Esther, or any other woman, to share this home.”

“But a way will open, love, if you do your duty as you have done. God will surely open your way.”

“I shall do my duty mother; but—”

“Well! I declare ef you two aint there yit, in the



moonlight, more like a couple o' lovers than like an old woman and a grown-up man. It makes no difference to you, I s'pose, that can lay a-bed in the morning, late 's yer like ; but I should like to get to bed."

It was only Hannah's rough way ; for she aided the invalid with touches that were gentler than her words ; and after she had gone, Loren came back, and sat by his mother's side until she fell asleep.

He was up early in the morning ; but for the next week he did not once don his blue frock and go into the harvest field. The men came up to the old, long, back kitchen for their meals ; and he came out to speak about the work, looking so old and worn, that they hushed their talk, and said, "they guessed mebbe, the old lady was kinder failin'."

Hannah went about in grim silence, half-awed by the shadow on the threshold, and more than half-provoked at Loren, "who insisted on nussin' his mother, as if she hadn't nussed sick folks long enough 'fore he was born !"

The dreaded frost came one night, and the next day, in the clear, bright sunlight, the trees passed from glory to glory. Once more Loren took the wasted form to the couch by the window, and while her eyes drank in the beauty, her soul drifted out into the sunset—so swiftly, that no farewells were said ; so gently, that no one knew when she was gone.



## CHAPTER III.

It was a beautiful harvest day, but the farmers left their fields, and the women their work, and from miles around they came to the funeral of the woman who had been known among them as the "widder of Deacon Wilde." At an early hour many vehicles, farm-wagons, buck-boards, "buggies," and carriages, surrounded the farm-house gate. Women seated themselves in the parlors, and took mental inventory of the furniture; smoothed their gowns with fingers that could not help being fidgety on a week-day in their Sunday gloves, and whispered and sighed at intervals, with minds divided between neighborly sympathy and curiosity.

The men stood in groups in the porch or about the yard, till Parson Burgess arrived, when they followed him and his daughter Esther into the house. She took her place with the quartette from the church choir, in the darkened parlor, at one end of which the gentle woman lay, with the silver hair shining through the gloom. A white cloth covered the round-topped stand, upon which lay the family Bible.

Hannah was there, sitting grim and still; but Loren



was not to be seen. The door of his mother's room stood ajar; and there, out of sight, where he could see nothing but his mother's sleeping face, he sat. He did not hear the words of Scripture, or of prayer; but when the voice of Esther rose in the hymn, the tears sprang to his eyes, and he felt his mother would be glad that she was near. He never lifted his eyes to meet kind neighborly glances as he passed to his seat in the carriage by Hannah's side; he never lifted them to the glowing hills during the ride to the church-yard, in the outskirts of the town; but as he turned away from the new grave, he became conscious of Esther's eyes watching him through her tears, and again a ray of comfort stole into his darkened heart.

The snows came early that year. Loren felt the world wept and mourned with him. November rains chilled and drenched the glow of color from the leaves that were so sunny and golden on the day his mother died; fierce winds followed, stripping the trees of even their nun-like robes of brown; and the whistling snows came hurrying on, and buried them, with the mosses and withered ferns under its frosty robe.

Winter came early, and lingered late that year, and at the Wilde Farm all was icy and grim. Upon Hannah's secret comfort, that Loren had now no one



but herself, there stole often that jealous fear that Esther Burgess might have won his heart. But as winter advanced, and he gave himself to his work, rarely going to the village, except on Sunday, spending his leisure in his mother's room among his books, she grew more at ease, and really strove to do all in her power to make it a comfortable home. When one day he found that his mother's room had been cleared of every familiar article, his heart showed its first sign of life.

"What do you propose to do with the room, Hannah?"

"Clean it, and paint it, and put the parlor furniture in here, and make a sitting room of the parlor."

"O no! sister, I can't let that be done. Clean, if you think it necessary, and do as you please with all the rest of the house; but put every thing back here just as it was, and then let it alone."

"Why, Loren, I never did!—"

"Don't let us talk about it, Hannah. It won't hurt you to leave it, and it hurts me to have it changed."

And though she openly disapproved, and secretly rebelled, the room was left as Loren wished. Her idea of making him happy was to work and to save for him, and she did it, unconscious that her ways often tantalized far more than they helped.



When at last the chill of winter began to yield to the warmth of spring, Hannah saw things in Loren that she called "signs of a thaw." He went frequently to the village; his eye was brighter; his head more erect, and his voice had a cheery sound. She ought to have been glad; but, alas! to her it meant that the love of Esther Burgess was growing and ripening in his heart, and that again her life was to be "pestered out by the coming of another woman" into the home.

But she crossed her bridge before she came to it; there was no reason for fear. Loren remembered his mother's warning; and, much as he loved the pastor's daughter, he would not ask her to share the home with Hannah Wilde. Unfortunately for himself, Loren was wanting in that peculiar masculine assurance, that what a man wishes, must be the best for all concerned; so the fact that he wanted Esther near was not sufficient proof to his mind that he could surely make her happy. Neither did he feel he should persuade her into an acknowledgment of love, while the time seemed so distant when he could offer her a home. So he possessed his soul in patience, and forced himself to be silent toward the precious girl, who was only the more dearly, because so secretly, beloved.

So, as the summer wore on, Hannah watched



vainly for signs of a renewal of the association. She knew, for she had overheard his confession to his mother that autumn night, that her brother loved the girl; and her nervous anxiety on the subject sometimes almost betrayed her into angry taunts. One day she returned from the village, shaking the reins on the back of the old white horse, and talking to herself with more than unusual emphasis as she slowly ascended the hill. Loren, coming from the fields, entered the gate as she reached it, and she could not wait to deliver the news she had brought.

"Well, it's jest as I expected: she's jest that kind of a girl, and I always knew it."

Loren gazed at her curiously, as she avoided his offered hand, and jumped to the ground.

"That Esther Burgess is makin' herself perfectly rediklous, and she a parson's daughter! A pretty example she's settin', goin' round with a pictur'-painter all over the hills. Why she'll be the town-talk."

Loren's eyes flashed, but he never asked a question. He knew too well that any arrow Hannah let fly at that mark would be poisoned by her own jealousy and spite.

But Hannah would not succumb for any assumed indifference; and when he came in, after taking the horse to the barn, she stood patting her hair between



her hands by the little foot-square mirror in the kitchen clock.

“I don’t s’pose you’ll believe it, Loren.”

“Believe what? I don’t believe any evil of Esther Burgess, if that’s what you mean!”

“Well, I s’pose you’d believe your own eyes. I saw them myself—a black-whiskered-man and Esther sittin’ by the road-side ’twixt here and town. He was makin’ a pictur’ of the hill, or the gorge; or more likely ’twas Esther’s face. And he’s been a-payin’ ’tention to her all the summer. He’s the same feller that was up here last summer, stayin’ over to the hotel in the Notch; and they do say she’s engaged to him now.”

Loren’s face grew more hard and set, but he only said: “And whom do you mean by they?”

“Well, all the village of Wiltonby, and Mrs. Maddles, who’s took him to board. He wanted to be nearer, I s’pose, than he was last year, bein’ as he was engaged.”

“How can you believe such gossip, Hannah? The artist is a stranger and a foreigner; that is, he is half-English and half-Italian. Do you think Parson Burgess would like such a son-in-law?”

“No, more he don’t!” snapped Hannah; “he’s ’bout heart broke, so they say; but she wont hear to reason, and now she’s worrited her father into con-



sent; and they are going to be married; and he's promised to take her to Italy, 'mongst his folks; s'pose likely they'll grind organs, and sell chestnuts round the streets."

"Well, if that is true, Hannah, then be sure that Parson Burgess knows all about him. He's a good artist, and, as far as any body can learn, a good man, with means enough to give Esther a pleasant life."

"Well, if you stand up for her, I am beat! I don't see how you know so much about it;" she added, a cunning desire to go to the bottom of his knowledge getting the better of her secret triumph.

"Of course, I know what people say; and if Esther wants to marry him, that is her own affair; but I don't believe a word of it, notwithstanding."

And at that very moment the terror in his heart, lest it might be true, was all that he could bear, and not cry out in anguish. Dallying, concealing, taking for granted that he could win her—could it be true that he had lost her?

That night before he slept, he sought the pastor, her father and his friend, and from him he learned the truth.

"I don't know really why my heart misgives me so," he said, wringing Loren's hand; "the man seems to be, and is, so far as I can learn, most worthy of her. I could have wished it different," he



said, with a glance at Loren; "but I can do nothing more. They will go to Italy, where his father's family came from, and he will pursue his art there. He has some means, and her heart seems set upon it; though I think it is the chance of change and travel, and all that, that tempts her. Anyway, it's all settled now."

And Loren went out of the minister's little study to wander, he scarce knew where, up and down the hill-sides, to fight out the fight in his own heart; to conquer that which made it so hard for him not to hate his life and his home and his sister, and every thing, save the memory of his mother's love. He made his way to her grave at last, and there grew still enough to go home. At morning he came out from his room and went about his work; but there was something in his face that kept even Hannah still.

She had triumphed: he had nothing but herself. But she was afraid to be glad; and though she watched eagerly every sign of progress in the courtship, and knew every detail of Esther's quiet marriage and departure from beneath her father's roof; and though her views and comments often rose to her lips, yet the silence that had fallen between her and her brother, concerning his mother, widened and included Esther, as if she too were dead.



## CHAPTER IV.

THE six years following Esther's departure were too short for many changes in the little town among the Franconia hills, but long enough to see the graves of her father and her mother grow green in the little church-yard, and long enough to touch Loren's hair with many a thread of gray. They were years of as calm content to Hannah as any that she had ever known since Loren's mother came. With the strange contradiction that sometimes marks the warping of a hard nature, she felt a great resentment at the woman who had won and wasted his love. While she would have used every effort to keep her out of the home, she hated her for her power to make Loren want her there. That he did long for her and miss her she never doubted, though he never spoke of her; and his kindness to herself never seemed to fail. He sat at the table which she prepared; he read the Bible at morning devotions; he drove beside her to church; he placed her interests before his own. He lived beside her, but not with her; they were neighbors rather than friends. So she cherished hard and bitter thoughts of the two, in



whose memory he found his companionship, and clung to a sense of ownership in the qualities that made him "looked up to" among his fellows. She appropriated his virtues in place of his love; felt his goodness a credit to her rearing. If the season proved hard for some unlucky neighbor, it was Loren who aided him without feeling it any thing out of the common line. Loads of wood from his lots found their way to the yards of the widows or the aged poor. The town business came naturally into his hands; the church looked to him whenever its days were dark; and farmers said, they "wished their boys might make such men as Loren Wilde."

And while the autumn of the sixth year made her crown of crimson and gold for the mountains, away in a sunny land, where the only change was the slow pallor that turns to gray the green of the olive boughs, sat the woman he had loved.

It was one of the narrowest streets of Rome, a mere alley, between the gaudy Via Babuino and the steep cliff of the Pincian hill. Five minutes to the right, and one was in the broad sunshine of the Piazza del Popolo. The same distance to the left, and the gay di Spagna wooed the loiterer to linger within sound of the tinkle of its fountains. Above, the pines and palms of the Monte Pincio beckoned and nodded, and the tramp of horses and the footsteps and



voices of the gay crowd could be heard at sunset. Yet the little by-way was dark and damp; mud ran in the gutter below; the flowers, that seemed to live even in the shade in Rome, withered in the little court, from which innumerable stairs climbed up to the "ultimo piano," a dingy studio at the very top. It was so high, that the gay Pincian throng could have looked in at its windows; and away up there was one balcony which grew warm and bright in the sunshine that flooded the hill. Upon this balcony a little boy sat, watching with childish delight the carriages slowly winding up the hill, or the horsemen who paused to listen to the music, or to chat with friends. The gay equipages passed on around the circle, only to appear again, an ever-returning delight to the half-imprisoned child.

He was a sturdy little fellow, with rosy cheeks and blue English eyes. Though not yet six years of age, he looked at least a year or two older. He had tied a string to the railing; and as the horses pranced upon the hill, he drove his imaginary steeds with a jaunty toss of the head, and many a flourish of the olive bough, which served him instead of a whip. The window behind him was open, but the child did not heed the voice of his mother, who sat within, softly singing to a baby girl, some eighteen months old, that lay asleep upon her lap. The room was



nearly bare of furniture, and showed its occupants had tried to make it serve both studio and home. Against the gray walls stood several pictures in various stages of progress. Upon an easel was a finished picture of a "Holy Family," in which it was easy to see that the artist's family had served as models. The young, patient face of the mother, as she bent over the babe, the sunny curls of the child, were on the canvas, and in the infant St. John leaning against the mother's knee reappeared the sturdy figure of the boy.

A long curtain hung midway across the room half concealing the couches, table, and cooking utensils of the little family,—all showing marks of poverty not far removed from abject want. The low lullaby died on the mother's lips as she heard a step on the stair, and she glanced up with an anxious look into her husband's eyes.

He answered her look with one scarcely less troubled, and drawing a chair to her side and laying his hand gently on the head of the baby girl said, in a low tone, "Well, Esther, it's only another failure; I cannot raise the money for the journey."

The woman's lips quivered, and her face was a shade paler. "But have you done nothing, Roberto?"

"I have sold the picture of the Sorrento coast,



and the Peasant Group ; but the proceeds will not pay our passage."

"What are we to do, then?" asked the lady, sadly. "Surely, Roberto, no one ever tried harder than you have done. We cannot stay and starve, and we cannot get the means to go home."

"I think you are right in saying I have tried. I felt so sure of success ; but each year it becomes harder. I never painted so well ; yet the market is overcrowded, and it is not always the merit of the picture that commands a purchaser."

The man arose and paced up and down the floor, folding his hands behind him, and dropping his head dejectedly upon his breast. His wife rose softly and laid the sleeping baby upon the couch, taking care that her husband should not see the tears that fell upon its sunny head.

"Papa, come and see me drive my horses ;" shouted the little fellow from the balcony.

"Hush, Lawrie!" said the mother, as she passed and joined his father in the walk.

"Courage, Roberto ; we shall yet be able to get home. You have friends there, and so have I ; and once there, your work will be sure to sell."

"But the way, Esther! I do not see the way. And the courage is not hard to keep for myself ; but for you and the children."



“Roberto, will the money you have take you to your aunt?”

He started, and an angry flush came to his face. “To my aunt? take my family to my aunt, in beggary? She would not give me a soldi, Esther. My coming would only be one more thing to forgive.”

“But she has nothing to forgive; you have done no wrong!”

“No, Esther; but I might as well have been wicked, as unfortunate. She has never forgiven my mother for marrying my Italian father. They were orphan sisters; and Aunt Carruth had my mother in her care. She hated my father because he was not Scotch, I suppose, for there could have been no other reason; and although he never took a dollar of my mother’s little fortune, but left it for aunt to protect and increase, she never freed him from the suspicion of unworthy motives. Indeed, she never approved of any thing that he did, except his dying. Then she took my mother home, and she died there, and left me to my aunt’s care. She loved me, I think, and wanted to be kind; but she hated any sign of my father’s tastes, and I had them, every one. I was Italian, and she tried to make me Scotch, but failed; I rebelled, went my own way, and loved my father’s art and my father’s land.”



“ Surely, that was right, my husband ! Why do you speak so bitterly ? ”

“ Because I do not know if it was right ! As it has proved, it seems all wrong. When she found I would not put my little fortune in business, she gave it to me intact, not a penny lost, of all my grandmother left my mother. It was not much ; but it seemed much to me, and I traveled and studied, and did no real work, till I saw you and loved you. Then I began to work in earnest. Really, I believed I could make you happy, dear ”—and he threw his arm around her protectingly. “ And now it has come to this ! ”

“ But it is not your fault, Roberto ; it’s not your fault. Surely we have lived carefully, and you have worked well ; and if that cruel fire had not destroyed your pictures, I am sure they would have been sold. And it will be well yet, Roberto. Let us try Aunt Carruth ; she cannot be unforgiving still. We need not ask her to give ; only to loan what will take us home. We can return it by and by.”



## CHAPTER V.

MUCH longer they talked; and it ended thus: There was money enough to take Roberto to Glasgow, where his aunt resided; and from thence, if she would loan it, he could send money back for the mother and children, who would join him in Glasgow, whence they could sail for America. It was a hard thing for the man to do; and for himself he would have preferred to starve, but no wall of pride must be allowed to shut out the last hope for his little flock. It was a hard thing for the mother to do, to let him go, and to be left with just money enough to pay the studio rent, and buy bread for herself and babes—just enough, nothing over—and then to wait and to pray and to hope, until she could hear again. But she would stay in-doors, so that if any visitors came to buy, as possibly they might, she would not lose one chance. She would put her scanty wardrobe in order, and make all ready for the journey; and soon the letter would come. In their earnest talk they had forgotten the little boy, who tired of play, had stolen in, and stood by his mother's knee. Just as his father said: "Well, Esther, I will go; and the sooner the better."



“And I will go, too, mamma!” the child exclaimed.

“Go where, you darling?” she asked, drawing him close to her lap. “Do you think you could go and help papa to take care of mamma and baby sister, little man?”

“Yes, yes, dear mamma, Lawrie wants to go and help papa; can I?”

The parents exchanged looks; and suddenly it flashed across her mind that the bonnie brown curls and blue eyes of her fair-browed Scotch-looking boy might be a better help to papa than any tale of talent unrecognized or courage lost.

“Could you take him, Berto?”

“Yes, indeed; but could you spare him?”

“Perhaps it might be best. Perhaps one will be enough for me when I make the journey alone; he will not be too great a care to you?”

“No, no, a comfort instead;” and the sad-hearted man arose to go out and make his preparations, while the mother hugged the boy to her heart, and tried to forget that in giving to his father an added joy, she was adding to her sorrow manifold.

She was faithful to her resolve to speed the days by every effort, after they were gone; but strive as she might, it seemed years since she held her boy against her breast, and felt his little arms clinging tight about her neck. She worked as long as she



had any thing to do, mending the threadbare garments, till stitches would do no more for them. Then when the days flew on, and the letter did not come, she tried to keep herself from too great anxiety, by taking her child in her arms to wander in the sweet sunshine, under the pines in the villa Borghese, where she used to go with her husband, and sit and talk and read while he sketched, when first they came to Rome. The old city had grown dear to her in the six years of sojourn ; and if she loved it first for her husband's sake, she had long since learned to love it for her own. She found a sad pleasure in revisiting all the dear old haunts ; and whether in some dim church, or among works of art, or out under the blue sky, she felt as if she were telling good-bye, not for herself only, but for him who was already gone.

It was on her return from one of these walks, in which she had led her toddling child down the aisle of St. John Lateran, and seen her lift her baby hands up to the benign faces of the sculptured saints, that she came home to find that the looked-for letter had come. With a heart throbbing painfully, she took it to the balcony, and the gay and fashionable crowd drifted unseen, and the music flowed unheard, as she read the words that to her meant hope and comfort, or trouble and despair.

As she opened the letter a draft fell to the floor ;



and she gathered it up, and held it tight in her trembling hand, while her eyes swam with tears, so that she could hardly see the written words. But the draft itself was answer to her agony of anxious dread and fear.

He had been successful. He had sent her the money to join him. Their way had been opened, and she knew by the intensity of her relief how intense had been her secret dread and fear.

When she could read she passed hastily over the account of the voyage from Genoa to Marseilles, and thence onward. The sea had not been in gracious mood, but the boy had proved to be a brave little sailor, a pet and favorite to all on board.

The old house in Glasgow, filled with the gloomy old furniture of his grandmother's time, had not changed since he was a boy, nor had the countenance and manner of his severe-visaged aunt.

"I felt as I approached the house," he said, "the old dread of her come back again, that I used to feel when on Sunday afternoon she sat me down to my catechism ; and it was not dispelled by her greeting, which was somewhat more severe than cordial. The only mitigation of its severity was the satisfaction she felt in being proved in the right. My life and art had been a failure ; my mother's fortune had been squandered ; I had come back as she had prophesied ;



and the privilege of telling me so gave a tone of mercy to her voice. I tried to be quite frank with her. I told her of the unlucky fire which destroyed pictures which I was positive would have sold ; and she as positively expressed her ‘opinion that they were probably better for burning than for any thing else ;’ and there, too, perhaps she was right. The boy, my comfort at every step, failed me here. She did not spare me in his presence ; and he watched her suspiciously as she talked, emptying one by one her vials of wrath on my head—unconscious, dear little man, that I deserved them all. I could see that she was touched by his resemblance to my mother ; but he would not once smile upon her, and she soon decided that the laddie had the wayward and willful spirit of his sire. She said she supposed that I would rear him to be worthless, like myself, and I bore it ; for I remembered how good she had been to me, and I could see, too, that her old heart yearned a little toward the boy.

“She had an open warfare with him the very first night, for he would not leave my side to go to bed till I was ready to go ; while I, poor weak papa, had not the heart to force him. I let him sleep, therefore, in his chair, with his head on my knee, thus affording her an admirable instance of my bad management of the spoiled child. She took advantage of it, Esther,



and told me that while she had no faith whatever in the success of my projects, or in me, she saw a hope for the family in my son. She was willing to relieve me of his support, to care for, to educate, and to provide for his future, so far as her means would allow, if I would give him up entirely to her care, and remove all my own pernicious influence from him. On this condition, and this only, she would advance me money to go to America, and would welcome you here into her home in Glasgow, and provide funds also for your coming to me. She urges that you come to her and spend some time, that you may judge of the advantage it will be to our boy to be her son and heir, and thus leave him here of your own free-will. She is a woman of singular, straightforward honesty of principle and purpose, and she is quite sincere in her conviction, that thus, and thus only, can the precious boy be saved from what seems to her to have been the vagabond life of his father.

“To all this, my dear wife, you know my heart has but one answer—one which yours will echo—we cannot give up our boy. Still, my judgment questions, whether, having failed, to my shame be it said, to provide for him myself, I have any right to deprive him of the protection of another. I believe, if you come, you can so soften her views as to admit of his remaining, say, for a time, till I have proven



to her my power to care for him myself. And after much thought, I have, in this extremity, left the matter in your hands.

“With great reluctance, Aunt Carruth has advanced me the cost of my own passage to America, and the cost of yours from Rome to Glasgow. I send the latter, to which I add a portion of the former also; for I cannot bear that you should come to her so utterly destitute. I have reserved what will take me across, and provide some comforts.”

Here the wife for the first time looked at the check. It was larger than she had hoped—larger than it could have been, if Roberto had kept any thing but a steerage passage for himself. She shuddered to think what that might be, and chided herself for the half-indignant feeling that had been aroused by his apparent consent to abandon his child. Tears filled her eyes as she read on :

“My aunt disapproves altogether of my taking you all to America, before I know how I am to provide for you. And though she seems hard and arbitrary, she means to be most kind in her request that you come at once to her, and make her house your home, till I am settled, and the way is clear. She urges my losing no time; and as the steamer sails to-morrow, I have decided to take passage in her, and to leave Lawrie with Aunt Margery, till you shall decide whether



he shall be left permanently, or shall come with you to me. I am the more anxious to hasten, inasmuch as I find that by this steamer I shall be in season for the autumn exhibition, and if you find you are not to come at once, send out the picture of the Holy Family. If it is bought, it will give the means to bring you to me, should you decide to bring Lawrie, in which case my aunt will not wish to help you further. My hope is that you will lose no time in coming to her, and that from her the way may speedily be opened for you to come with both our children to your loving husband,

ROBERTO DONALDI."

When the letter was finished, the music had ceased on the Pincian ; the day had died into twilight ; the child had fallen asleep upon her mother's bed. The glow with which the letter had been welcomed had gone from the reader's face, and in its place was a great sadness, mingled with a great resolve. The dread and terror of waiting had gone ; but in its place the dread and terror that almost paralyzed, while it called for immediate action, had come. The grinding poverty had been a hard fight to bear ; but here was something harder still ; something which she could but fear ; yet which she dared not fight. To give up her child—never, if she worked on her knees to keep him ! She sobbed bitterly over



the sleeping babe, and when it woke, she fed it, and prepared it for its night's rest, caressing and kissing it as if she were loving it for two. She had borne up well till now; but to-night the hunger for the boy was the wild mother-longing that would not be denied. She lighted the candle, and on her knees before the picture of the Holy Family, she watched the little figure, in his sheep-skin garb, until she could hardly forgive the painted picture of herself, that it did not loosen its arms from the child Jesus, and enfold, too, her beautiful, her precious boy. All other feeling seemed for a time to be swallowed up in love for him, and all desire to be lost in the longing to have him back again.

Too restless to sleep, she passed the night in preparations for departure; and ere the sunset of the next night fell, the studio waited a tenant, and she was traveling on her way.



## CHAPTER VI.

ROBERTO'S stay was short. It was his last night under the roof where most of his childish days were passed. The somber stillness and stiffness of the old house had oppressed him as a boy, and there was nothing in its unchanged aspect to lighten in the least his present gloom. He had been out to mail his long letter to his wife, and to make a few final purchases necessary for his departure by the ship that was to sail early on the following day. His aunt had left to him the task of telling little Lawrie that he was to be left behind; and, in the morning, he had taken the child with him when he went to examine his quarters on the steamer, and to arrange such comforts as the accommodation would allow. The child peered into the wretched steerage berth that was to make his father's bed, and asked quickly, "And where's my little bed, papa?—am I to sleep by you?"

Then was the time to tell him he was to wait behind for his mother; but the strong man, ready to face the terrors of the deep, had not courage to face the child's pleadings and tears. And so the moment passed.



When he came in that evening the child's happy faith that he was going with papa was still unbroken. Eager in his sadness for any comfort, he looked for a little face at the window as he came up, and felt a pang of disappointment that the child was not watching for him. The fire was burning on the hearth, the tea-table was laid for two, and Margery Carruth sat grimly knitting in a high-backed chair, with the tea-urn waiting by her side. She looked up as he came in.

"Late, Robert! I see you have lost none of your old habits! Now to be punctual is with me a matter of principle and conscience. I could not hope to accomplish any thing without it."

The man looked weary and dejected, and made no reply, except to say, with a quick glance about the room, "Where's the boy, Aunt Margery? You may readily suppose I would not be away a moment longer than I must to-night."

She fixed on him a glance of severe composure. "Lawrie is in bed and asleep, Robert." She had never condescended to give the Italian termination to either of the names: "Robert Donald was well enough," she said; "indeed, it had a Scotch ring: but it was enough of itself; it needed no nonsense at the end, to take the respectability out of it and give it a popish sound."



“Asleep to-night! when I don’t know as I shall ever have him another night of my life! Why, Aunt Margery, that’s cruel!”

“It would be cruel to the child to keep him awake, as you did last night. I gave him his supper early, and he watched for you till the lamps were lighted, and then went to bed without any trouble. I had only to speak once, and last night you know you could not make him go at all.”

Robert winced, for he could only too readily understand the boy’s submission when he found himself face to face with the iron will that looked out of the cold, gray eyes; but he knew better than to contend, and silently took his tea.

“Where have you put the boy to sleep, Aunt Margery?”

“In the large room yonder, and Peggy will sleep there, too, so that he will want nothing,” said Mrs. Carruth, nodding toward an apartment of which the door stood ajar, and which Robert too well remembered as a gloomy, solemn bedroom, where in his boyhood he had often been left alone to meditate on his frequent disobediences, after his little legs had tingled under Aunt Margery’s rod. With sudden resolution he rose, and took the lamp; and, though Aunt Margery looked aghast at his presumption, marched across the room, entered the chamber, and



gazed upon his sleeping boy. The little fellow had rolled himself in a ball, like a kitten, one little hand upon his cheek, as if sleep had caught him in the act of wiping away a tear.

"I have a great deal to say to you, Robert, and if you wake the boy I shall have no opportunity," said Mrs. Carruth, appearing at the door-way. Robert stooped, kissed the little hand, and turned away, saying :

"Very well, aunt, I will listen now; but you need not put Peggy here to-night; I will stay with the boy."

"But the ship sails at day break, you said."

"Yes, and I had thought to go on board to-night; but now I mean to stay here, and I can slip away in the morning, early enough for the boat."

"Now, Robert, if you leave the child to me, there will be no trouble. Why will you insist on making it harder for yourself or for me? If he does not wake until you are gone, I can comfort him; but if you arouse him, you will be unkind to us all. Let the child alone, I say."

"I will leave him asleep, aunt; God knows I do not want to see him grieve; and I will slip away before it is light. You need not fear; only let me be near him one more night."

The child stirred in his sleep, and they took away the light. Had he dreamed it? did he hear his



father say he would go away and leave him? leave him with the woman that frightened him so? Suddenly he awoke, and, sitting up in bed in the dark, began to cry, and call "Papa," "Mamma," in tones that proved Aunt Carruth was right in her estimate of his power of protest.

Robert would have had him out of bed in a minute, and would have sat and held him, with his pink toes turned to the fire; but Aunt Carruth was too quick for him; and as she went toward the door, she said, shaking her finger: "Now let him alone, Robert; he will drop off again in a moment." And she was right; for, as she approached, and opened the door just enough to let her face be seen, the child saw it, brown false front, black cap, large-boned spectacles, and firm mouth, and he gave one cry, and plunged his curly head into the pillows.

"Lie still now, and go to sleep," she said, as she approached, and drew the blanket over his shoulders.

"Papa" came in a little smothered cry from the pillows.

"Papa is coming to sleep with you, if you lie still and go to sleep; but if you cry, I shall not let him come."

He checked the sob that was about to burst forth, opened one eye, and took another glimpse of the face that was so dreadful to his childish gaze. She did not



mean to regard him unkindly, or to speak harshly; but to his childish imagination a woman who could put "papa" when and where she liked to bed, was possessed of untold powers. He kept still, stifling even his sighs, for O! he wanted his father to come, and he knew somehow that he was just outside there by the fire; but that dreadful woman was between them. The idea that "papa" could come, or that he could get to him, unless she permitted it, never entered his sleepy brain. He lay still as a mouse, and Mrs. Carruth went out of the room with a triumphant visage.

"He's asleep again, as I said," she nodded to the restless man, who was pacing between window and hearth; "and I hold you to your promise not to wake him in the morning. Peggy will prepare some breakfast, and leave it here on a tray. I shall tell you good-bye to-night, for I am not as young as when I took you to bring up, Robert."

Still she did not say good-bye. They sat and talked far into the night, and she spoke many words of warning and advice, and he listened patiently and endured it as best he could.

There were no more sounds from the bedroom, but in there a little frightened child was straining his ears to hear every word that they might say. He heard much that was meaningless to him, but one



thing he understood perfectly well: "that his aunt wanted his father to go away and to leave him behind." He would not scream, for this strange woman, the only woman he ever knew except his mother, would send his father away, and if he was good she would let him stay; so he took his first lesson in self-control, and met alone in the dark the first trouble of his little life. By and by, in spite of all his fears, drowsiness came as a mercy to this anxious little heart; and he slept so soundly, that when his father lay down beside him, he only waked enough to clasp his neck, and creep close and warm against his breast, and there slept on, till in the early twilight his father laid him gently on the pillow, and hastily prepared to leave him there alone.

It was not till he was gone, and a lamp was lighted in the outer room, that the child awoke. He felt for his father's arms. He was gone. Suddenly across his mind swept the dream, if it was a dream, of the night before. He remembered the face that peered at him from the door-way, and bent above his bed. He remembered his father's promise, "to go while he slept." He remembered stifling a shriek with a great gasp—that he must not cry or scream. He saw the light in the next room; he peered from his knees on the bed and saw his father's form; he dared not rush out, for in his terror he felt that she,



Aunt Margery, would catch him, and hold him back ; but he slid from the bed, his mouth quivering and eyes wild with dread, and felt around in the dark for the chair upon which Aunt Carruth's Peggy had hung his little clothes. How he struggled alone into the small trousers he never could remember. The socks and jacket were forgotten ; but he grasped in one hand his new shoes, bought only yester-morn, and crept to the door of the room. What he meant to do he could not have told ; conflicting desires filled his soul to escape and avoid Aunt Margery, and to reach his father's side. He crept to the door, instinctively hushing his impulse to cry out ; he even held his breath and peered out of the darkness into the dimly lighted room. It was empty, but he heard a step in the hall beyond, heard the street door open and shut, and knew his father had gone. Quick as thought he darted through the room into the wide hall, silent and dark beyond.

A great clock stood opposite the foot of the stairs, and between it and the door was just space in the corner for the little trembling figure to hide. Grasping his shoes firmly in one hand, the other was feeling for the latch, when a movement above arrested his attention ; and turning his head, he saw a tall figure at the head of the stairs. Then all was quite dark, except where the ray of light from the room he



had just left fell midway across the steps; he felt rather than saw, as he dropped his hand, and crouched tremblingly between the clock and the door, that Aunt Margery was moving down upon him.

Slowly and clumsily she descended the stairs, pausing just where the gleam of light fell on her figure. If he was afraid when he saw her in cap and wig of brown, how much more was she calculated to strike terror into his heart, with her white hair shining from under the ruff of her night-cap, her figure enveloped in a short red bed-gown and quilted petticoat of black? He gave one gasp of terror, and trembled in his hiding place as she came onward.

“Now—now she was near; in another breath she would see him,”—and—but no, she had passed on. She had not seen him; she entered the room and looked about. All was right apparently, and her nephew was gone. She stole to the door of the bedroom and listened, and shut it then gently: evidently satisfied that Robert had gone leaving the boy asleep.

Satisfied that all was well, she blew out the light, and then went slowly back again up the shadowy staircase. The little culprit could hardly see her, but he heard every step, and he even heard her sigh. Was it a sigh of weariness, or of relief? Poor little trembler, he need not have feared. She had not been unkind to him, and did not mean to harm him.



When she was out of sight and sound, and he heard a door shut above, he lost no time. A few trials, and the latch was undone, the door open, the little prisoner free.

Out on the pavement in the early twilight stood the little shivering figure, a gray cold sky above him, and the great brick walls shutting him in. Not a sound save the steady tramp of a man's tread, away there in the distance before him; no living thing to be seen, save one dim figure passing swiftly into the mist and dimness of the lower town. One eager look, and the next moment, after these heavy, receding steps, patter, patter, on the pavement go the little bare feet running away with all their baby strength from warmth and food into a world of pitiless hunger and chill.

The walk is slippery and cold; but on they patter, softly and regularly, as the heart-beats in the breast of the strong man, whose every stride takes him farther away. If he would only look back—if he could only make him hear. “Papa, papa!” he calls, ready to cry with his fear that he shall not reach him. Laborers come out from an alley, and go on their way to work, and they speak to him; but he does not stop to hear. “Papa, papa!” he keeps calling, under his breath. In and out, up and down the winding way he goes, until he sees his father come out upon



the wharf. There is a rocking boat, and luggage, and many men near, and loud talk, and profane words, and splash of oars—but before the boy reaches the spot the boat is already many rods in the bay.

Now, indeed, the little heart breaks ; and dashing his shoes, to which he had steadily clung, to the ground, his breast heaving with sobs, he stretches his arms after the boat. Just then a carriage drives down to the wharf, and several gentlemen, including two of the officers, are about to enter the ship's boat, still waiting, when the little sobbing, half-frantic creature darts before them.

“Stand back, boy ; make way for the captain !” says a sailor, putting out his hand.

“No, no, I am going too ; I'm going to my papa !” Before any one can seize him, he scrambles into the boat, and curls down on the bottom against the knees of the only gentleman that had taken his seat.

“Why, bless my soul, boy, what's all this about ? where's your papa ?”

“He's gone—he's gone on the other boat, and they didn't wait for me,” he repeated, in such anguished tones as went to the kind man's heart.

“What's it all about, Dick ?” said the captain to a sailor.

“Don't know, captain ; saw the little chap around



yesterday with his father, selectin' quarters; and there was a great mob and scramble as the boat pushed off just now; may be he was overlooked."

"All right, then, my little man, we'll take you out to the ship; and you can bring him back Dick, if his father is not there. But if you are going to sea with me, you must dry your eyes, my little man; sailor-boys don't cry."

And Lawrie hushed at once, crowding little red fists into his wet eyes, and sat in the stern of the boat, trembling from head to foot with suppressed sobs; yet with the childish mouth shut tight, and a look in his face as if he had fought his first battle with life, and conquered.

"Whose child is this?" asked the gruff voice of the captain of the groups of cabin passengers gathered in the saloons or upon the deck; but no one seemed to desire to acknowledge the woe-begone little waif, though they gave back pitying and curious stares in answer to the wistful glances he cast from under his lashes as they led him from group to group.

At last, just as the officer, impatient at delay, called out: "No more of this nonsense, now; the child does not belong here; take him ashore!" a pale, dejected man, who had been standing aft alone, with his eyes fixed sadly upon the water, suddenly turned and faced the throng. At sight of his face



the boy darted, like a wild creature, from the arms of the man who was leading him toward the gangway, and with a great glad shout: "Papa, mine own papa!" rushed to the arms of the bewildered man, clasping his neck so tightly, and shaking so with sobs and cries, that the father could not raise his head to answer the questioning looks of the crowd.

"All right!" shouted the officer on deck. And the sailors on the boat answered, "All right, the little shaver's got into port at last;" and before the father found words to explain the situation, the anchor was lifted, the ship began to move, and the boat that threatened to take the child from the father was left behind.



## CHAPTER VII.

It was an anxious journey from Leghorn to the Scottish coast. The ship sped well under the western winds, but the mother's longing thoughts outsped the wind.

Nothing but the heart-hunger for her boy could have overcome the timidity that shrank from meeting the aunt, with whom her Roberto had been so long in disgrace. While she felt her kindness toward them all in the present crisis, yet her purpose was very strong to keep her boy. How she should compass it she did not know ; yet the pang of separation was so recent and so sharp, as to blind her for the time to the advantage which might accrue to the child from such a friend as Aunt Carruth might prove to be.

They arrived earlier by one day than they were expected, and Esther went at once, with trembling heart, to the address given by her husband.

The old lady greeted her with a gravity and solemnity not without a touch of kindness and agitation.

She conducted her to her chamber, the best room,



one that had been honored by the presence of many a godly Scotch divine, and she bade Peggy to hasten with broth for the child ; and when they were alone, she came suddenly over to Mrs. Donaldi, who murmured "how kind it was to receive her for her husband's sake ;" and bent down, till the sharp hard eyes looked straight into the blue and timid ones.

"My dear," she said, sternly, "I am a plain old woman—a hard old woman, so my nephew thinks. It may be true, but true or not, I cannot bear a lie. I did not mean to receive you into my home. I had secured a lodging for you, and had written a letter to meet you at the steamer. I leave you to read it now, and you can judge if I am not justly angry and right in feeling that I cannot have any thing to do with Robert or with any thing that is his." And, before the bewildered guest could recover from her astonishment at the intensity of the old lady's manner, she had passed out and closed the door.

Alone, her boy not waiting to receive her—her baby carried away by Peggy out of her sight—worn with fatigue—crushed by the cruel unkindness and mortification—she was nearly frantic with distress. Her impulse was to rush after her aunt with a wild demand to be allowed to leave the house, when her eye fell upon the letter, which had dropped from her hand upon the floor. It held first an outer inclos-



ure, containing a check, and an address with the announcement, "that since it would be impossible to receive her under her own roof, lodgings named therein had been secured, which she might occupy at her pleasure at the expense of Mrs. Carruth."

There was another letter sealed, and marked, "To be read at leisure." Its words were few and concise.

"Since it had pleased her nephew to make an old woman his dupe, and to extract money from her under pretense of accepting her care for his boy; and since he had taken most shameful advantage of her credulity and her years, she felt that she could not receive him or any of his own, without reviving her indignation and contempt. She hated a lie. She pitied his wife and babe, left destitute in a strange land; she inclosed what would save them from want here, and would take them to America, but she must not be expected to meet them face to face. Any effort to see her would be unavailing. Robert had raised another barrier, only more insurmountable than all his previous conduct, and she trusted never to see or to hear of him again."

All this, and no word to say what crime he had committed!

Indignantly she gathered her shawl about her, descended the stairs, and entered the presence of Aunt Carruth. The old lady was standing by the



window, spectacles on the nose, and before her stood Peggy, holding up to her gaze the little girl, who, fed and comforted, was smiling up into the withered faces about her, a sweet May flower creeping into the breast of December. At the sound of her step the old lady turned, not quick enough, however, to hide the softness of her gaze, and Esther demanded hastily :

“Give me the children, please, and I will go away. I do not understand it at all ; I do not know what my husband has done,” and her voice broke ; “but give me back my boy, and I will go.”

“Your boy ! your boy !” said Mrs. Carruth, in a bewildered tone ; “he is not here : do you not know that your boy is gone ?”

“Gone where ? Good heavens ! what do you mean ?” and she grasped the sideboard for support, while the little girl cried out at the sight of her mother’s white and frightened face.

“Gone with his father, child,” said Aunt Margery, coming near her, her face flushing with the recollection of Robert’s deceit. “Did he not write to you that he would do it ? Did you not together send the child, that he might use him to deceive my foolish old heart ? He promised to leave him till you came, and then he stole away with him in the night, while I slept. He has taken him to America with him.”



"I cannot believe it; I cannot believe it. It is not like Roberto to do it: there must be some mistake."

"No, no, there is no mistake. I have seen a sailor, who saw the child on board, in his father's arms. He said they came down to the wharf at early dawn; that in the confusion the father was taken out to the ship in a different boat from the son, and he saw them both together again after they met on board."

"I cannot understand it; there is some mistake. Roberto has not made his life as you could wish, I know. He told me he was willful and troublesome in his youth; but he was never mean and never cruel! Think, he would not have been so cruel to me! He sent me no word. I cannot account for it I can only beg you to let me follow quickly—to-morrow—to-day if I can, and let me get out of your sight until I can go."

It must indeed have been a stony heart to resist this broken appeal. Had she known all the weary struggle of the years just passed, she could but have seen that this sorrow crowned them all. But Aunt Carruth was not convinced, though she hid her impatience at Esther's unbroken faith, and controlled her own indignation, half-ashamed that her vials of wrath should have broken on an innocent head. And when Esther, trying to lift the child to her arms, fainted dead away at her feet, she helped



Peggy to lay her on the bed, and bent over her with all a mother's pity in her face.

When consciousness returned Esther would have gone at once ; but she was hardly able to rise from her bed again till the day when the steamer sailed. And all this time Aunt Carruth kept mostly out of sight, and between them Robert's name was never spoken again. If she could have seen the aged face leaning over the little Stella's couch, tracing in the baby features the lineaments of the sister she had loved, she would have known the old heart held a store of tenderness as yet unspent.

They parted without many words, Esther hoping the day might come when she could repay all, and the aunt relenting toward the babe, almost to the point of secret pardon for her papa.

The voyage was quickly made. The second-class cabin was crowded ; the mother ill all the way, dropped helplessly upon the hands of the stewardess, who cared for her kindly, and sometimes took the child for an airing on the deck. Here the pretty prattler became an object of much attention ; and one day the stewardess said : " There is a kind-looking Italian woman in the steerage, traveling all alone from Genoa to meet her husband in New York : why not let her have charge of the child ? She would do it for very trifling payment. She may



sleep here on the sofa, and can keep the little girl on deck during the day. You ought not to keep the child in this close cabin."

The poor mother, too ill to rise from her couch, reluctantly availed herself of this opportunity; and the child, quite content with the woman, whose words and ways were like those to which she had been accustomed in Rome, for the rest of the voyage toddled about the deck, holding by her finger, and growing brown and strong in the breezes and the sun.

When the steamer entered the harbor, and all the passengers crowded on deck, the feeble mother, who had hardly lifted her head all the voyage, came too. Timid and lonely, she stood amid the crowd of strangers as the boat swung round to the wharf. There was a hurrying, cheering throng on the pier, and the deck swarmed with happy home-comers, who now and then descried some familiar face, and gave back loving word and smile of greeting, impatient for the moment when these should be exchanged for kisses and clasping hands.

In the bustle and confusion no one noticed how eagerly Esther's sad eyes searched the crowd. "Surely Roberto would come; she had written to the address which he had given her in New York. He would meet her and bring her boy;" and for the moment she was glad that the boy was here, even if



the method of his coming was unrighteous. Excited and eager, she did not notice the exclamation of delight with which old Felicia, who had been standing beside her, rushed down the stairs and away, with the little Stella in her arms, to welcome a swarthy Italian, who, as the boat swung around, stood where she could almost touch him from the lower deck. In an instant she missed her, and hurriedly descended to her state-room to see if Felicia had taken the baby there. As she entered the room a gentleman exclaimed heartily to another standing near :

“Why Norton, is this you? How did you come on board?”

“I came down with the mail-boat to meet Wilson’s family, who crossed by this steamer.”

“Did you, indeed? but where’s Wilson? He sailed ten days ago, why isn’t he here to meet them himself?”

“Why, haven’t you heard? poor fellow, he was on the *Atlanta*.”

“Well what of that? isn’t she all right?”

“All right! Why, my dear fellow, didn’t you know that she went to pieces off Newfoundland?”

“No—surely you don’t mean it. The *Atlanta* wrecked?”



“Yes, a total wreck ; not a soul saved but a sailor or two. Poor Wilson went down with the rest.”

They moved out of hearing, and the boat touched the wharf, and in the joyful rush that followed no one noticed that a white-faced woman dropped as if dead upon the floor of her room. No other room opened from this little corridor that led to hers. No passenger hastened back for missing parcels. The stewards were intent on “speeding the parting guests ;” so a long time elapsed before they found her, and still longer before they succeeded in restoring her to partial consciousness. Then one convulsion followed another with such frightful violence, that an ambulance was called, and the mother was taken to a hospital, never having once aroused sufficiently to miss her child. The physician shook his head, baffled and doubtful over the curious condition, whose only merciful phase was that of delirium, which kept from the patient’s mind all recollection of her overwhelming accumulation of woes.

In her delight at the sight of her husband, Felicia had not forgotten that the babe she held in her arms was not her own. • When the first greetings were over, she hastened back to the deck, now cleared of people, and there, where she had left the mother, she found only the bag and parcels which she had dropped beside Esther when she ran below with the child.



She gathered them up, and took her place on the wharf, and waited patiently for the mother to come forth. At first her husband was full of talk and spirit, and waited with her; but soon he grew tired, and insisted that she should go home with him, and leave the child to the care of the stewardess. But the stewardess had hastened ashore, and the poor woman, who had not been paid for her labor and care of the child through the voyage, finally consented to go with her husband, who said, "You can bring the baby home, if you will, and then you will know the way back, and can return by and by with the child. I cannot wait all day for it."



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE home to which Felicia was taken was not a very inviting one: a back room, high up in a wretched tenement house in Baxter Street. In filth and dirt, it was equal to any of the lowest haunts in the narrow streets of Genoa, and far more populous. There, at least, one could climb to the house-top and see the blue sky and sea; here there was the gutter without, and men and women and children fitting for the gutter as fast as they could within.

One room was a nest of rag-pickers; one, a pawnbroker's shop of the lowest class; one, a whisky den; and in the basement a man kept hand-organs to rent: and in a den behind his shop was a cage of chattering monkeys to be rented also, if the grinders needed additional attraction to entice the pennies from the children.

Matteo, Felicia's husband, had taken a room for his wife, with a closet opening from it, to be used as a workshop by himself, though she found too soon that he was not often there to occupy it. His business was repairing hand-organs, and he managed to earn enough from the shop below and from similar



shops to keep his wife from starving, and himself in a chronic state of semi-intoxication. He had not wished her to come to him, and had told her that he could not support her here; but her heart had nothing but him, so she saved up the passage money soldi by soldi, and wrote him she was coming, and would work and support herself after she should be here. It was a sorry home to which she climbed with the little fair child in her arms, and Matteo celebrated her arrival by drinking himself wild before night. It was late in the afternoon when she went out to take the baby back. She could speak no English, and wandered about without finding her way to the ship, and finally returned home foot-sore and bewildered and distressed. Then next day Matteo told Felicia he would go himself to the captain of the ship, and if the woman could not be found, would take the child to an asylum; but when he returned, he was again too intoxicated for her to discover if he had or had not made inquiries; and as the days went by she longed to keep the little comfort that slept so contentedly in her arms, and was secretly glad, when one day Matteo discovered, in the parcel the mother had left on deck, the remainder of what money Aunt Margery had given, and told her he had decided to keep the child himself, and that on no account was she to tell the neighbors the babe was not her own.



Rejoiced at first, she repented her silence sorely enough, when the brute one day told her she had been idle too long, and that he would not keep the child unless she earned something. He had hired one of the heaviest organs, with a basket upon the top; and strapping it upon his back, he bade her take the child and meet him in Union Square, more than two miles away. In obedience was her only safety for herself and the child. He did not spare her curses, nor would he have withheld blows; but from the first threats concerning the child had sufficed to keep her in subjection to his will. She was yet a stranger; and when he placed her in a street car, she clasped the babe in her arms, conscious of a feeling of relief from his presence which lasted until she saw him put his organ on the front platform of a following car. Strangers looked admiringly at the little girl, and Felicia felt proud as if she were indeed her own; but when on reaching the square, the man took them into a side street, and, the little two-year-old protesting with all the resistance of her baby-will, was tied into the basket, and the three began their weary rounds before the gay shops, the poor woman's heart was almost broken with pity for the child, and shame for herself. At first the little girl sobbed and struggled, and stretched her little hands toward the nurse's arms; but Felicia kept close by her side, and



the music and the moving crowd, the throngs of little children and the bright shop-windows, soon attracted her attention, and kept her amused and pleased.

Matteo had not mistaken the treasure he had in the bright young face—beautiful in its shadow of waving hair ; and many a finely dressed lady paused to smile at the child, and touch her dimpled cheek with daintily gloved fingers, that left silver pieces, instead of pennies, in baby's hands.

It was the beginning of a new life for Matteo and Felicia and the child. It was far more profitable to him than was his work at mending organs, and he was, therefore, in better humor.

Then he gave them stronger food ; and it was surely better for the woman than the close air of the garret where they lived, and the company of such people as surrounded them. She was allowed to be with the child, also, which was to her mind far better than leaving her to the care of the half-tipsy woman in the neighborhood, who kept a dozen little ones for their mothers, while the latter went out to their work.

Sometimes, when Matteo wanted a longer carousal than he could compass in a night, the woman was sent out alone. Loud were the curses if she did not at night return the maximum sum. Little by little



she acquired enough knowledge of the English tongue to make her way without him ; but his fears lest the new source of revenue be taken from him inclined him to watch her very closely. This selfish fear was a protection to the little creature, to whom he gave angry words in plenty, but no blows. He knew that the child had such a hold on the heart of his wife, that she would only part with her to protect her.

As for the baby, she slept much in her little wagon, and smiled upon the passers-by, who tossed pennies in answer to her pretty coquettish greetings, and rarely refused to drop silver in the little hand that threw them kisses as they passed. The scene of the operations changed often, and sometimes the tramps extended away from the city for a time.

It was a sad day for little Stella when she grew too large for the farce of infant distress she had been called upon to play. For the little feet had now to do their own tramping, and the little hands to run with Matteo's hat, and collect the pennies from the crowd. Felicia was usually left at home on these days, for Matteo had found other work for her to do ; and all that both could earn was none too much for his spending.

These were hard years for the child. The home was still dingy and desolate, and the food was often



bad. Sometimes she climbed at night to Felicia's garret-rooms, over women, their neighbors in the house, sitting in a drunken stupor on the stairs. Ribald boys darted at her in the dark corridors, and she flew like a frightened bird, with fast fluttering heart to her room. Girls of her own age shouted and played with the boys in the gutter and on the pavements; and girls a few years older flaunted cheap finery at the corners of the street.

Her father, as she called Matteo, often halted at the door of the neighboring dram-shop after a day's journey with the organ, and Stella made all speed to Felicia's room, and rushed straight into her arms, glancing behind her, that he should not follow the caress with a blow at the poor woman's face. Angry words fell full often upon them both in these days; nor could Felicia's care always save the child from the hand of the brutal man. If she was not agile enough in the crowds; if she failed to smile sweetly in the face of the passers-by; if for any reason the money was less than usual—the little girl shared his outbursts of temper with her nurse. The street gave her its share of rough words too. More than once had ladies sprung back from the outstretched hand with, "Keep away! don't touch me, you dirty child!" More than once men pushed her roughly from the path; and once she had only been saved from the



wheels of a carriage by a news-boy, who laid her, muddy and frightened against a lamp-post, where the light showed him tears streaming over a dirty little face.

"Don't cry, sissy!" he said, wiping away the mud with the sleeve of his jacket. "I didn't mean to hurt you; but if I hadn't pulled you all of a sudden, you would have been trampled to death."

Still she cried, and clung to his hand, and only stopped when Matteo came over the crossing, and, seizing her roughly by the arm, began to shake her, and scold her for going under the wheels.

"It wasn't her fault; you sent her; you know you did," said the boy, stoutly, looking indignantly at the man. "You saw the carriage coming, and told her to run and get some money."

"No, no!" began the man, making an angry dive in the direction of the boy's head.

"You did, too, and I heard you; and you're a mean old fellow, to let a little girl beg money for you. Why don't you go to work, like a man?"

But before he could speak further the Italian caught him by the collar, a little crowd gathered, and a policeman appeared on the spot just as the boy wrenched himself from the Italian's grasp.

"What's this? what's the row?" said the policeman.



"Nothing," said a boot-black ; "only Don Renzo has found another girl to fight for !"

"I declare," said another news-boy, "he's the bulliest boy ; he's always findin' some poor little girl to pull out of the gutter, or to raise a row about. Why don't you let the girls alone ?" And then the boot-blacks and the chimney-sweepers laughed.

"He pulled me out from under the wheels and the horses," spoke the child, rubbing her tearful eyes.

"Yes I pulled her out," said the boy, looking steadily at the policeman ; "but that isn't what made the row. Here's her father sends her across this slippery mud, a little baby-girl like that, and then, when she almost breaks her neck, shakes her for falling. That's what's the row ! I'd like to shake him. He's a lazy, drunken old thing ! I've seen him many a time as ugly as he could be to the child, and I've wanted to break his head, and I'm glad he knows it !" and the next moment the boy was on the outer circle of the crowd, crying, "'Evening Post,' last edition, three cents ! Here's the 'Commercial,' 'Post,' and 'Express !' Great fire in Liverpool ! First-class murder and suicide in the Bowery !"

The crowd laughed, as did the policeman also ; and the Italian seized the hand of the child, and marched sullenly down Broadway at a pace that kept the little



girl's legs flying as they never flew in any hour of childish liberty and play.

As he passed a corner a saucy voice cried, "‘Express,’ extra, two cents, latest news, tragedy in high life ! Italian father runs the legs off his infant child ; only two cents !" And the child answered the twinkling eyes of the mischievous boy with a grateful smile, that took any sting from the frown which the Italian bestowed. Poor Stella went climbing up the stairs that night, crying as if her heart would break ; Matteo had been sullen all the way home, and had grasped her hand so tight that it hurt her as she trotted by his side ; and he gave her a blow as he took the money from her, that left a mark on her arm from which not all Felicia's kisses could take the purple stain.



## CHAPTER IX.

FELICIA was sent out with the organ the next day ; and when they saw the lad who had helped her, little Stella's face grew glad.

"O, mamma, there he is," said the child ; "the boy who pulled me from the wheels." And when the boy came toward her and emptied a handful of sweetmeats into her apron, Felicia said, "Grazia, grazia !" and the lad ran away, amid the jeers of his comrades, having satisfied himself that the child was in better hands than her father's, at least for that one day.

"Goin' to 'dopt the little girl, Don?" asked a sooty-faced boot-black, seated on his box, waiting for a "shine." "Make a capital thing for the papers : 'Don Renzo, great paper merchant, 'dopted helpless little orfin!' Better git a bald head and gold spectacles, ef you're goin' to open an Orfin Asylum, Don."

And the boys laughed, and Don laughed with the rest, as he answered : "It is mean enough that there isn't an Orphan Asylum, where they can be kept from the street. It's easy enough for us boys ;



but I tell you it's mighty hard for a little girl like that one, and I'm goin' to fight for 'em every time I see one in the hands of a father like hers."

Some laughed, some sneered, and one boy cried out: Bully for Don and his orfins!"

As Don moved on about his business a boy, considerably larger than himself, exclaimed: "I'd like to know who Don thinks he is, a-bragging round here. Why, the other day he jest knocked me down, for snatching a bouquet for my button-hole out of Biddy Waters's tray, at the door of the theater. Yes, and he paid Biddy for the bouquet, too—what d'ye think o' that? I think I'll be even with him yet. I'll give it to this little gal, the first chance I get."

"You daresn't say it before him—ha! ha!" giggled another boy.

"I daresn't, Jack? You'll see!"

But just then, Don's clear voice sounded around the corner: "'Tribune,' 'Times,' and 'World,'" and away they went in search for customers, without waiting to prove to him their courage.

Still, opportunities were not lacking for the harder boys of the street to torment the little girls, and even to tease and worry Stella, who was as much afraid each time as if she had never seen them before. Matteo wearied of his organ tramps after a while, and Felicia could earn more with her needle;



so he set Stella new tasks, in which his own share was to sit smoking his pipe at some point in the street, and watch her as she plied her little trade. She had her little bunches of glass-headed pins, "five for a penny;" but these were only that she might not be arrested for begging. Under the cover of the offered pins she was instructed to beg, and he concocted one story after another, of "starving mother," "sick sister," or "dead father" at home, and bade her rehearse them in a beggarly whine, and then seated himself near, that he might watch the passers-by. He carried sometimes a tin dinner-pail, as if on the way to or from his work; or if snow was on the ground he bore a shovel, but when asked to clear a walk, he invariably "had just got a job in the next street."

One cold afternoon in October, when the pitiful face failed to arrest the hurrying feet or to touch the hearts of the passers-by, the brute beckoned to her with his pipe; and supposing it was time to go home, she followed him down an alley, where he questioned her as to what she was to say. "Why don't you tell them your father is dead?" he asked.

"Because he isn't," she replied.

"Yes he is, too," he answered, with an oath; "and if you don't say so, I'll thrash you to-night." Then he took what money she had, broke in two pieces a



cake which a child had given her, and ate the larger piece himself ; took off her ragged shoes, and thrust them into his pail ; and then sent her forth again, telling her, if she wanted shoes, to ask the ladies and gentleman for something with which to buy them ; and if she did not bring back money enough, he would send her out bare-footed until she did.

“ You don’t get any thing, because you don’t want any thing ; and if I keep your shoes, your feet wont grow to the pavement.”

Poor child ! It was stinging weather, and she was very cold, and very much afraid of this man, who was never quite sober enough to be kind ; yet Felicia had told her to sell her pins, but to speak only the truth ; and no one would buy the pins, and she would be beaten if she did not tell the tales, as her father commanded her to do. She ran on, her tears of distress fast growing into angry sobs of temper against the cruel papa. During many years he had used her for his gain, and now for the first time she rebelled. She did not know what to do ; but of one thing she was sure, she would not obey. Gayly dressed ladies passed. Mechanically she lifted her pins in their faces as they hurried on, all the time knowing that he watched her, and all the time throwing defiant glances in his face.

He rose to follow her, and she seized a stone at her



feet, and threw it at him with all her force. It fell far short of his head, but she turned and fled as if the little bare feet had wings—up one street and down another, out of the crowded avenue into an almost silent row of fine residences, where, out of breath, she ran against a lad about thirteen years of age, swinging a pair of new bright skates in one hand, while with the other he caught her, and saved her from falling, and laughed merrily down into her frightened, tear-stained face.

“Why, what a little whirlwind!” he said; “what are you running after so furiously?” She dropped her head without a word, ashamed and ready to cry.

“Barefooted, too, this frosty night! What would my mother say to a little girl without shoes?”

Suddenly the child grew conscious of her bare feet, and tried instinctively to curl her red toes under her tattered gown; but he said: “Look here, little girl, there’s half a dollar; run right down into Sixth Avenue and buy yourself a pair of shoes. No, wait a minute; I don’t believe that’s enough. Girls’ shoes must cost more than that. I’ll ask mother, and get you more,” and he darted up the steps of a handsome house, and disappeared within the door. She stood bewildered, grasping the half-dollar, watching the closed door, when, suddenly, with a whoop which she knew full well, Jack Brown, the boy



whom Don had thrashed, and two or three of his rough companions, were down upon her.

“Here she is, Bill; come on, Tom! Now, little gal, jist give us the money you’ve got to-day. We’ll take it instead of your daddy to-night; for we want ‘backy,’ and an oyster-stew dreadful. Give it up quick, or I’ll take yer home; and yer dad’ll lick yer when yer git there.”

But the spirit of resistance to the father seemed to have extended to all of his sex; and when they took hold of her to search her pocket, she kicked and scratched and bit like a little fury.

It was only an instant—the door re-opened, and a light boyish figure sprang down the steps, and in a moment was in the thick of the fray.

“Come on, Jack; by my life, there’s Don!” said Bill, hastily.

Tom started to run; but Jack, now thoroughly angry, and more than ever resolved to conquer the child, had already grasped the hand that clung to her half-dollar, and at the same time dealt a blow at the youth, who was trying to protect her, which sent him reeling against the stone steps. “I’ll fix you, and teach you how to meddle with my affairs;” and he raised his boot to kick the almost insensible boy, when a strong hand was laid on his throat, and a twist at his collar made him suddenly loosen his hold.



"Let go, Don—let go," he howled; but Don did not let go. He held him by the collar and punished him well, in the heat of his passion, only stopping when Stella, who stood crying near, exclaimed: "O! do help the poor boy; do help the poor boy!"

Then he loosed his hold on Jack, who made the best of his chance to escape, and turned to the prostrate figure on the pavement.

He was quite insensible; and while Don was looking up and down the silent street for help, Stella said: "I know where his mamma lives; in here:" and she ran up the steps, rang the bell, and hastened back to the side of the insensible boy.

The door opened, and a gentleman looked out upon the scene.

"There's a boy out here, who has had a fall," said Don; "does he belong here, sir!"

In a moment the gentleman was at his side. "Ralph! Ralph! my poor son; what has happened?"

"I don't know whether he fell and hurt himself, or whether some one hurt him," said Don, gently.

"Let me help you to carry him, sir."

They raised him gently, and bore him into the house. A colored servant went up the beautiful staircase, and opened the doors before them, and they laid him on his bed. And the little bare-footed child followed after, with wide-open eyes, from which the



wonder was fast chasing away the terror and dread.

But Don saw only the white face of the boy, and the white face of a gentle lady, who came weeping and leaning on the arm of her maid from another room.

“What is it? What has happened to Ralph?”

“He has fallen on the steps, dear,” said the father.

“I think it is only a faint.”

“Jack pushed him,” said a little voice at the foot of the bed; and they turned and saw two bright eyes, and a little scared, troubled face.

“Are you the little girl for whom he came to me for money? He said you had no shoes.”

The child’s head dropped down, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Let me go for a doctor, please;” said Don, seeing how useless was the effort they were making to restore consciousness to the boy.

The father drew him aside, and they hurried down stairs together, the gentleman giving him a physician’s address.

As Don turned the first corner of the street a policeman laid his hand on his shoulder, and said, “You must come with me, sir!”

“And why?” asked Don; “I must go for the doctor for a gentleman; his son has been hurt.”

“Yes, and who hurt him?”



"I don't know," said Don; "I was not in the fight."

"Then who pounded Jack Brown to a jelly, I should like to know? I met him running away from you, you young rascal; and he said you had been stealing money from a little girl, and had nearly killed a boy who was helping him to defend her."

"What a lie! Let me go for the doctor please. The child is in there; you can ask her who hurt the boy."

"Not I; you go to the station-house to-night, and to-morrow'll be time enough to prove your innocence."

"Well, let me stop at the doctor's on my way, and then I'll go at once; it's just in the next street."

This was granted, the message given, and in the house such was the anxiety about the injured lad that no one noticed that the boy did not return.

When consciousness revived, and Ralph opened his eyes, he said to his mother, looking anxiously about her: "Where's that little girl? Did those bad boys hurt her?"

"No, no, she is here, and safe. She has gone down to supper, my boy."

"You will take care of her to-night, mother?"

"Yes, Ralph. Don't try to talk. She shall be



cared for, I promise you." And Stella was confided to the housekeeper's care. The servant bathed her, and put her to bed in a room that seemed to her like a dream of luxury and warmth. She tried to keep awake, to look at the pretty walls, and at the pictures, and the open fire, and the birds, rolled up like little feathery balls, asleep ; but not even beauty and pleasure can keep slumber from childish eyes.

When the new day broke over Lindsay Mansion the voices were hushed, and the treads on the carpets softened, for Ralph, the son and heir, was very, very ill. The physician said there was an injury to the spine, the result of the fall on the stone step. It might prove fatal ; it might make him lame for life ; only time could tell. The doctor broke it gently to the father, and at the same time advised that the knowledge of the true condition be withheld from the invalid mother.

"She must not try to nurse him, Mr. Lindsay."

"Then, who can do it ?" asked the father.

"I cannot say ; but unless you know some one better, I have an excellent person, well trained in the hospital service, a gentle lady, who has seen better days, and is especially tender with children ; and I would give her charge of a child of my own."

"Then bring her here, and God bless you !" said the agonized father, wringing the doctor's hand.



## CHAPTER X.

As the doctor was about to depart the housekeeper came through the hall leading little bare-footed Stella by the hand. The doctor looked at her curiously, "What is this?" said he, putting his hand under her chin, and lifting her face, so that her lashes no longer veiled her eyes.

"It's the little girl Master Ralph was for helping, sir," said the woman, with a courtesy "I was to ask the master what is to be done with her." Mr. Lindsay's face looked sad and perplexed enough.

"I'm sure I don't know; what does his mother say?"

"Well, I don't like to ask the mistress; she's very bad this morning, she is; and I don't really think she would like to have her in the house, she being the cause of Master Ralph's hurt, you know."

Suddenly the long lashes lifted, and the tears sprang to the eyes of the astonished child.

"I didn't do it; no, indeed, I didn't hurt the pretty boy. Jack did it, wicked old Jack."

"And who is Jack? your brother?"

"No, no," stamping her foot impatiently; "Jack's



bad. Jack struck me, too, and Don beat him," she added, triumphantly. "Don will kill him, I hope."

"Who is Don?" asked Dr. Smith; "and who are you?"

"Madre Felicia's little girl; and I sell pins."

"Where do you live?" But suddenly the child's whole manner changed to one of fear and dread.

"I live with papa Matteo, but I don't want to go home; he will beat me!"

"Don't be frightened, child; you shall not go home yet. I think," added the doctor, "the first thing will be for me to take her home in my *coupé*. My wife will know what to do with her. She's a manager at the Five Points Mission, and I would not wonder if she might be cared for there."

So, wrapped in a comfortable shawl, her hands filled with cakes, the six-year-old child, who, barefooted, had struggled in the streets last night, went bowling about the town in the corner of Dr. Smith's *coupé*, gazing from the window, in all the pleasure of a new experience. He did not go directly home; but in his turns suddenly they came out upon the Sixth Avenue, at the point of her contest with her father the day before. There he sat, tin pail in one hand, and old jacket upon his arm, his red nose redder now than ever, and his swaying figure giving token of an early dram. She shrank back in the cor-



ner of the carriage as they whirled by, and the wicked desire for more stones to throw came again to her heart, and she clenched her little fists, and her breath came hard.

The doctor called at the Child's Hospital in ——— Street, and left her sitting in the carriage while he entered the institution. Stella could see through the window that he talked with a pale, sweet-faced woman, dressed in some soft material of gray, and knew that he was telling her of the wounded boy—"Would he say she did it? that she was the cause of it? She wished she could hear."

As he came out, he said, "Go as soon as you can, Mrs. Darrell; I know you cannot well be spared here; but his life depends upon your care."

"I'll do my best to save him, sir," she answered, gently, and the door closed, and the carriage rolled away, and then to his own house—the morning visits were done. Nothing could exceed the kindness of the doctor's wife and that of his little girl, in some of whose clothes Stella was soon arrayed.

Then, after luncheon, the lady took her little charge with her to the mission in Park Street. They left the fine mansions of the wide, silent avenues behind them, and drove on by the shops of the Bowery, passed the solemn Egyptian front of the "Tombs," to the region where great warehouses fronting the



streets, hid from the casual gazer the swarming tenement-house population, filling every narrow street and alley in the rear.

Stella knew the prison called the "Tombs." She had often passed her hat in the crowds that gathered when the black van came up, and the prisoners were brought forth to be taken to Blackwell's Island, or to the prison at Sing Sing. She knew her home was near; but she said never a word when they stopped before the mission in Park Street. The Five Points Mission was a large brick building, in the lower part of which were the superintendent's office and residence, a chapel for religious services, and rooms for the Sunday and week-day schools. Above were rooms for the ladies, upon whose direction depended the conduct of the work, and where they came to cut and prepare the garments that clothed annually hundreds of the needy children of New York. The rest of the building was divided into apartments, in which temporary homes were made for widows and children, until provision could elsewhere be secured. With one of these families the little girl was placed, till they waited to see if any one would claim the child.

Unfortunately for her, the excitement of the day, and the exposure, barefooted, to the cold of the last evening, brought the little wanderer to her bed.



She was not very ill, but ill enough to be inactive, and in this enforced quiet of the body the brain and soul began their conscious life. Until very recently she had been like other healthy children, unconscious of the misery that surrounded her life. She loved Felicia, she was afraid of Matteo ; but she did not know that for any childhood there was a lot without frequent curses, and occasional hunger and cold. Sad enough it is, but none the less true, that there are multitudes of children who count that a happy day in which no one's anger toward them comes to the sting of blows. Very good people say, therefore, " O ! they don't mind it, they are used to it, and it does not hurt them as it would hurt my child or yours." God knows ! Certainly they are less ready with their cries and tears, and prize each hour's relief from positive misery as a positive joy ; yet the pitiful hurt to the little souls, the hurt in the lack of love, only He can measure, who said, " Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Surely Stella had loved to be out in the sunshine, and to see the people in the street. The first wish of her life during the days had been to get back to Felicia at night. Then came to her the first outside kindness she knew, and she had learned to search through the days for the sight of Don ; and had felt the first stir of conscious wickedness in her hate for Matteo. Now she had seen two beautiful homes,



warm and bright, and with roses even in the carpets on the floor. She had always wanted a rose, ever since she first saw them in the windows of the florists, and she had never yet had one in her hand. She had been on the soft cushions of a carriage, she had seen her first glimpse of a new and wondrous world. And she lay there, while the fever burned in her cheeks, and dreamed her first dream, and bore her first real pain of heart.

The words of the housekeeper had sunk like poison into her mind ; and, when nervous and weak, she hid her face in her pillow and cried. It was not for Felicia, or Don, or the carriage, or the roses, or even for hate of Matteo, her wicked old papa. It was that the beautiful boy's mother had thought that she "had caused his hurt." She understood it now, and she saw that if he had not given her the money, he would not have been touched by Jack. It had been a wretched childhood ; but of all the drops of bitterness in her cup, this was the first one whose taste her childish lips could not escape.

For the first time shyness came upon her ; she grew timid and hid her face when ladies came in and looked at her ; lying there battling with the low fever that kept her scarcely able to creep about, and unable to join the children in their work or play. But she heard them sing in the chapel ; and some-



times, when no one was nigh, her little voice would pipe out the hymns, in tones so sweet and clear that the listeners stopped to hear, and the superintendent of the Sunday-school awoke to the fact that the sheltering mission was a song-bird's cage.

Soon they persuaded her to sing in the school ; and when the time came for the missionary to make his annual autumn trip to the country, to speak in the churches in behalf of the work done by the mission, he decided to take four or five little girls with him.

He selected those who had no homes ; and if they could sing, he let them sing in the service of the Sunday-school, wherever he might present the cause in which he was interested, always carefully avoiding any allusion to the personal history of these particular children. Usually they were very glad to go ; but when they told Stella she was included in the singers to be taken, she begged so piteously to be allowed to stay behind, that the kind man had not the heart to insist. It was hard to persuade her to go outside of the mission walls, for the only time she had gone from Park Street into the thoroughfare she had seen her father Matteo at the door of a drinking shop. She had run from him as if her life depended upon it, and he had not seen her, for he was nearly stupefied with drink ; but before she reached the mission a thought seized her, which she



put into immediate action. She had longed daily to see Felicia, and had not dared to go, lest Matteo was there. Now he was away drunk, and he would not probably go home till night. She would go and see Felicia, and he would not know she had been there.

She knew her way to Baxter Street, and was not long in reaching the door. She darted in, passed the organ-grinder's entrance, and up the many flights of stairs, as fast as her little legs would go. The door was ajar; she pushed it open, the room was empty, the furniture had been removed, and spiders had woven a curtain over the dingy panes. She stood in blank distress, ready to cry, as the truth dawned upon her that they had changed their home, that perhaps she should never see her mamma more. She remembered all her kindness, and began to be ashamed of the fear that kept her so long away.

As Stella turned sorrowfully toward the steps she heard Matteo's voice away down at the door. His utterance showed his condition; "My little girl is here, Jack Brown saw her come in; he told me;" he said to a woman whose door stood open below.

"No, she isn't. I have been sittin' here all the time; I haven't seen her."

"I'll go up and see," and he staggered against the railing."

"No, you wont; you're too drunk. I'm not goin'



to have you break your back on my stairs. Come in here and take a glass of whisky to steady your legs, and then go."

And the poor idiotic creature went in, tempted by another glass, and the woman closed the door behind him, and down, like a frightened bird, the light feet of the child fluttered from step to step.

She neared the closed door, stopped, waited, and darted back—he was coming!—no, it was only a creaking step; and she darted past, gained the street; and, without stopping to look back, ran till she reached the door of the mission. She cried herself to sleep; and when the kind woman who had her in charge tried to soothe her, she said: "I will go to the country; I shall never find my mother."

"Did you think you could find her if you stayed."

"Yes, yes, and I tried. I watched the house every time I went out, and I did not dare to go till to-day, and now she is gone. I shall never see her again; and I don't want to stay here, for papa Matteo will hurt me and make me beg."

They soothed her sobbing, and promised her she should go away to some nice home, where no one should do her harm; perhaps there would be roses and green trees, and real birds, instead of the little whistling things tied to a string which the men sell at the corner of the streets.



So she was comforted, but disappointed in the hoped-for change, for she was too late.

Already the missionary had started upon his autumn tour among the farmers of New Hampshire and Vermont, who often sent him cartloads of potatoes and barrels of apples for winter distribution, or made contributions toward the Thanksgiving dinner of the little ones, whose homes were too poor to provide the annual feast.



## CHAPTER XI.

THE morning of the second Sunday in November rose clear and cloudless. The gold and crimson of the foliage had changed to russet and brown, and the road down which Loren Wilde drove to church was carpeted with rustling leaves.

Hannah found herself rheumatic as the winter frosts came on, and Loren was going to church alone. He tied his horse in the old brown shed, as his fathers and grandfathers had done for generations back, and took his seat with his neighbors, waiting quietly for his share of the bread of life. He was not much changed, but his hair was whitening young, as his mother's did, and he was not ruddy, but grave and quiet and strong. A stranger was in the desk. Five little girls sat in one of the front pews, and the stranger spoke, and these children sang, and the words, less than the music, pleaded the cause of the little ones, far away in the great city, orphaned, or worse than orphaned, tossing on the waves of poverty and temptation and sin.

Hard, knotted knuckles were seen to creep into eyes unused to tears; and when the pleading was



over men gave quite generously, touched by childhood's woe, whose life-principle had been to get and to keep all they could. Money came hard to these hill-dwellers; and nobody knew how hard it was "to pay it out." Indeed, when the preacher pleaded for homes for the children, some would even more cheerfully have given these—for in that case the work would be "upon the women-folks, and the livin' wouldn't count"—than to pay the reluctant dollar which did "count." Still, no one was moved to the point of offering a destitute child a home, unless it were Loren Wilde, who gave his horse the rein all the way up the hill, and rode with his eyes on the ground, seemingly wrapped in thought.

After supper, at which he told Hannah about the sermon, he retired to his mother's room, from which he issued at sunset, and took his seat with his sister on the porch.

Then with a manly directness, characteristic of himself, he told her he wanted to talk to her seriously about his life—about their mutual life—of how little it gave to them, and of how little it did for other people. He talked of the folly of yielding their lives to a farm, that returned them only food, and to which they had no heir. He told her he felt bound to do something for others, or at least for some one poor creature who had no home. He said



he had been thinking of the pastor's words, and thought it would do them both good to bring into their home a little boy or girl to be reared as their own.

At first she flew into a passion, which fell like water on a rock. He simply waited till it passed by, and went on from the point in the conversation where she had begun.

She saw no reason in the world why the shiftless part of the world should prey upon the industrious. Let people work, then they would not starve.

They talked long, and not always calmly; but he alluded to the days, surely coming, when she could not, with her knotted fingers, do every scrap of work of every kind; when her swollen ankles would not take every step, and asked if it would not be better to have, then, a willing, loving daughter to whom she would have taught her ways, than a servant.

Then she seemed to feel the force of his words, and foreseeing that when that hour came Loren might take a wife, she could see it might be better to take a child. So, at last, with many objections and protests, she consented, and Loren, who had scarcely said "sister" once since his mother died, somehow brought in the word to-night. Before morning she repented, but Loren was not to be moved. "He would abandon the farm, do any thing



rather than live this useless life ;” and at last, when he went to the village, he left her muttering to herself, “that if they got hold of his principles, he was ‘sot’ as the dead, and, after all, may be ’twas as well to let him have his way in this thing, to keep him from something wuss.”

He called at the parsonage. The missionary and the children had already gone; but he was not to be dismayed. He took an unusual holiday, and went to New York. He visited the bookstores, and replenished his shelves with the latest works on the subjects that he loved. He bought a new dress for Hannah, and found himself looking in a window at toys and candies for the imaginary little girl, though he knew well that no such indulgence would be allowed. Sunday afternoon he was at the “Five Points Mission,” and his great heart nearly broke when he saw the multitude of little folk—four hundred at least—who had no homes, or worse than none; who came on Sundays to be taught, and on week-days to be clothed and warmed and fed. He felt like gathering a lapful up in his arms, or taking a cart-load of them home to unlimited nuts and apples and bread and milk; and it was well Aunt Hannah had specified “only one,” or he would have gone out from the mission like the “piper of Hamelin Town.”



When he looked at the children, he could no more choose than a boy of five could choose one plum from a pudding. He knew Hannah wanted a strong and hearty girl, one who knew nothing of her parentage, one who could begin at once with the "chores," and be readily taught to work; and he, Loren, wanted some forlorn, helpless little being to "make much of," and to love.

Utterly bewildered by the multitude of faces, he sat in great perplexity, till a silver-haired lady, in a pause of the exercises, asked a tiny child of seven years old to sing. She came to the front of the school-room, and stood so near his chair that he could have touched her; and when the song was over, unconscious of the eyes upon him, he reached out his arm and drew her to his side, and looked into her eyes.

"Look up, my child," he whispered; "I want a dear little girl to go away with me into the country, where the apples are red on the trees. I want her to be my little girl, and to live with me. Would you like to go?" And the child dimpled and blushed; and then, looking long and questioningly in his face, first crept close to his side, and stood perfectly still and content. He kept one little hand, and the exercises went on, when the teacher, thinking the child might be receiving too much atten-



tion, said, "You had better go to your seat now, Stella."

The child looked up in Loren's face, but never stirred. The gray-haired lady drew near, and whispered :

"You had better go to your seat now, my dear."

"I should like to keep her. I should like to keep her always. I came here to choose a little girl, and this child is the one I want."

It did not take long to satisfy the Mission of the advantage of such a home as Loren's for the child. Nor did he like to wait long to take his treasure away. From the time they started the child never wavered in her utter content. For the first time in her life she was in the presence of a soul that really loved to be good to her. It was touching to see how utterly she resigned herself to his care, and became unmindful of the new scenes through which she passed, in the new world of kindness in which she was enwrapped.

It was like a happy dream, and they were children together. The dream was not broken until, the journey over, they stood face to face with Hannah, who drove down to the railroad station, behind the old white horse. Then the chill and change that came over the child were hardly less felt by the man. Hannah did not mean to be hard or cold, but



they were all embarrassed ; and in her heart she was not pleased. The child suddenly seemed very small to Loren, who remembered that Hannah wanted a girl old enough to "save her steps."

Loren had not expected to be met by Hannah, but curiosity for the moment had conquered her rheumatism. She looked at the child, and said :

"Well, Loren, I must say this just beats me ! You're away off to New York to find me a help, because I'm gettin' old and have got the rheumatism, and you've brought back a baby for me to bring up ! That's like a man for all the world."

"Well, never mind, Hannah," said Loren, soothingly ; "the little feet will trot for you, I'm sure, and she will be a big girl before we know it, and the little hands will learn to work ;" and he threw his arm protectingly about the child. That was too much for her ; she could have borne Hannah's hard words—she had heard such before ; but at the kind tone, at the thought that some one protected and excused her, she hid her head on his shoulder and burst into tears. Hannah said no more, but her look and sniff were suggestive of her discontent.

Alas for Loren Wilde—if he had hoped an era of happiness had come to the farm ! Alas for Stella—if she dreamed she had come from the Hades of evil tempers into a heaven of love ! A new world,



indeed, opened to the child—a world of forest and field, of wild flowers and mosses and ferns—a world of swelling hills and grassy slopes and majestic mountains; a world of sky and space and light, and all things to delight the eye of a child. And under all this, how unconsciously her soul wakened to a sense of beauty and grace! How she loved the out-of-door world! so that she was happy when any service or errand took her to the fields. Loren understood it in her as he had done in his mother, and showed his recognition by giving her many a walk on Sunday afternoons, gathering the lichens and the fungi and the ferns. Kindly he planned many an errand for the sunset hour, when he knew the light upon the hills would shine into her heart and be reflected from her eyes all through the evening time.

He loved the girl, but he was often far from glad that he had brought her home. He knew that she had hard times with Hannah; but he soon found that he helped her best by not seeming to know; and when Hannah was impatient, Stella's greatest comfort was in her fancy that Loren was in the field, and could not hear. This helped her to be brave, though bravery was sometimes hard; for Hannah, though she ceased after a while to complain to Loren, was slow in reconciling herself to the child. She



allowed her to call her aunt, but she soon reduced her name, which Felicia had called Stellina, to Lina, saying: "My old tongue wont twist into any thing furrin not for nobody." She was not cruel, and rarely angry; but she treated the child as if she would be doing evil if not watched, and as if Satan laid in wait for idle hands. So, as she was always at work herself, the best way to keep Lina under her watchful care was to keep her at work also; and the steps the little feet took in a day were almost as many as in the organ-grinding days: to and fro, to pick up chips, and to bring in wood, to feed chickens, to hunt for eggs, to pick blue-berries in the field and raspberries by the wall, and to run to bring the cows from the pastures—the last a delight which Loren gave her, for it took her out at sunset, and the beauty rested the child as it often had rested him.

When indoors, the dishes were to be washed, and the table to be laid, the little bed to be made, the floor to sweep, and even to scrub—surely there was no chance for idleness; and if it was not a help to Hannah, it was because she was too proud to own it even to herself.

The only variation to Lina's life was that of the district school, where, summer and winter, she was allowed to go. Then she had the daily and weekly



journals; but the crowning privilege of her day was access to Loren's books, and the pleasure of reading in his mother's room. And when he read there with her, and selected and directed her studies, she felt her comfort was complete. All the more she prized it because the seasons were so rare when Hannah did not find something to interrupt their work.

"Here, Lina, help me to pare these apples to-night; I want to make the pies before you are up in the morning!" "Come, Lina, you'd better be knitting these socks for your Uncle Loren than wearing out his eyes over that fine print!"—and like suggestions were sure to come just as they were specially comfortable together. Still, in her own way, Hannah grew fond of the child. She would not have owned it, or allowed Loren to see it; and, but for her old jealousy of any thing Loren liked, she would have liked the girl herself. Still, years went by, and the child was growing toward womanhood, and Aunt Hannah had never once kissed her or spoken a really tender word to her since she came to the house.

Upon one thing she insisted from the first—that no mention of the previous life of the child should ever be made in her hearing; and to no one of her neighbors had she ever told more than that Loren



thought they ought to take a girl to bring up to help her, therefore they did so. Whence she came, and what she was, people might guess to their hearts' content—no one was ever told. And though Lina remembered perfectly well much that they would have her forget, yet she obeyed honestly Hannah's wish, and was as silent as the rest.



## CHAPTER XII.

A CHANGE had come to Loren's fortune by the addition of Forest Farm, which his mother's brother had left him when he died. It was on the hill beyond the town of Wiltonby, not more than three miles away, if one went by the paths of the fields and the woods, though much farther by the winding road. It was a fine farm, and a much finer house, than the Wilde dwelling. It was the place where Loren's mother had been born, and a home where he could have taken a wife, had it not come into his possession some years too late. Lina liked the spot, and welcomed any errand that necessitated a journey there.

One day, when she had been sent there by Aunt Hannah to take a message to the old woman who was left in charge of the Forest Farm, she found a carriage at the gate, and a gentleman waiting at the door, who raised his hat as he stopped to let her pass.

"Can you tell me if I shall find Mr. Wilde, the owner of this place, within?"

"Not here, he lives at Wiltonby, some miles away. I am going there; can I take a message for you?"



"No, I must see him personally. I have been looking, by order of our physician, for a house in which, during my absence abroad, to leave my little daughter, and a lady who for years has had charge of my invalid son. The air here on these hills is what we want; the scenery is lovely; and they told me at the Profile House that this place was vacant, and possibly might be rented. Do you think the house could be seen?"

"I can direct the housekeeper to show you the house, sir, and you will find my Uncle Loren at home."

Before night the gentleman had seen the owner of Forest Farm, and it was arranged that the lady should take possession of the house at once, and be joined by the son, who would remain during the summer.

"Rather queer," said Hannah, "to send his daughter and invalid son with a nuss, and take himself off to Europe? Where's their mother?"

"Dead, I think he said; the woman who is to have the care has been with them many years. Then the young man is not ill, only delicate from an injury received years ago. He has been well enough of late to go on with his education with his tutor, and he wants to ride and to shoot, and to live an out-of-door life, as the best means of keeping the strength he has gained."



"Will the three live there alone?" asked Hannah.

"No: the tutor will be there sometimes, and may be a friend of the young man; and Mr. Lindsay himself will return for September and October."

This was a long story for the usually silent Loren to tell; but he was anxious to leave Hannah nothing to criticise. He was glad of the change, though he hardly knew why. Perhaps he hoped it might open into something that would widen the life for his child. If so, he was gratified, for the coming of the strangers was the beginning of a new era for her. The lady who was to be installed mistress of Forest Farm soon came, and when Aunt Hannah found there were some changes to be made, she said she "did not want to have any thing to do with city folks' notions. If every thing was to be turned upside down, and new 'fixin's' put in, why, Lina must see to 'em—she had enough to do at home."

So Lina was dispatched to talk to Mrs. Darrell of the needful arrangements, and she walked over one day, when the early daisies were just opening by the path, and the forest trees were mossy with the bursting buds.

The farm took its name from the wood that crowned the hill, making a background for the white house, with its rambling out-buildings and wide piazzas, around whose knotted posts in summer the



morning-glories twined. Across the valley and over the hill and through the forest the young girl went, busy with her thoughts, which were all of the past, and not of the new life toward which she unconsciously moved.

The wood-path led down to the hill behind the house, and as the girl emerged from it she saw, standing on the piazza, a lady with a gentle but somewhat sorrowful face, apparently watching the wide valley that spread before her eyes.

She did not see Lina till she stood by her side, when, turning suddenly, she gave a nervous start, and the color went out of her face, leaving a deadly pallor, lighted by the saddest eyes—so they seemed to Lina—that she had ever seen.

“I startled you, dear lady,” said the girl; “I am sorry; let me get you some water.”

“No, no; it was nothing,” she said, grasping Lina’s arm as she was about to go for the water, and, by a great effort, controlling herself. “I was surprised; I was not expecting to see any one, and you came upon me so suddenly from behind!”

“I am so sorry!” the girl repeated, and blushed painfully. “I am Lina Wilde; and my Aunt Hannah sent me to go through the house with you, and to aid you in putting it in order, if I might.”

“Yes, yes; how very kind! I was so foolish to be



startled; but your face is so surprisingly like a face that I knew in my youth that I was overcome by it. Then you are Miss Wilde's niece—the daughter of Mr. Wilde? Come in, and let me make you rest; I am quite ashamed of my agitation.”

Then they talked together of the country, and the healthful breezes from the hills, and, after awhile, together went over the house.

“I am going to put some curtains here,” said Mrs. Darrell, “and cover these old sofas and chairs with chintz, and hide the mantels, and drape the beds with bright colors; but these are not things for which I care to give the landlord any expense.”

“I'm sure he would be quite willing,” said Lina, wishing she could say as much for Aunt Hannah, whose stormy denunciation of extravagance she already heard as in imagination she told her what the “city folks” wished to do.

“But that is not right, Miss Wilde; this house is furnished quite comfortably as it is, and I prefer to get the things myself; but I would be so grateful if your aunt could spare you to come and sit with me in the afternoons. We would make them together, and you could help me in making the place bright and pretty; and sometimes, perhaps, you would read to me.”

“O, I should like it so much!” said the girl, on



whose spirit the quiet ways and the gentle, refined voice had a soothing effect. She had all a young girl's susceptibility to a new atmosphere, and this was one in which she felt she should be quite at home.

So she told Hannah, who said: "Well, I'm glad if she wants nothing but work. I s'posed Loren would have to pay out for no end of nonsense. You can go, after your work is done here; but if she treats you as if you were a hired girl, let her know ~~very~~ quick that we don't calculate to have no girl of ourn work out."

"O no, Aunt Hannah, she is not like that at all; she even said that I might read to her while she sewed; and when I said Aunt Hannah sent me, she answered: 'So you are Mr. Wilde's daughter?' I said nothing; for you told me you did not wish me to answer any questions about my parents."

"No more I don't," said Hannah, fiercely. "You belong here now, and it's nobody's business where you belonged before."

"But, aunt, is it honest? is it not a lie?"

"Now, who are you, I should like to know, that will teach me what's a lie? We took ye and fed and clothed and eddicated and tried to make a decent woman of ye, and now what possesses ye to want to go and disgrace us by telling what gutter we found



ye in. Go away! I haven't asked nothin' of ye but to hold your tongue! If ye can't do that, ye better never 'ave come. There now! I've put my foot down once for all!"

The girl raised her hand deprecatingly. She had had many a hard word and box on the ear, but she had never seen the Wilde temper so aroused before. She was just ready to start when it burst upon her head, and she went out into the air breathing fast, and trying hard to keep back the tears till she should reach the shelter of the woods.

Once there, she threw herself upon the carpet of yellow leaves, and, hiding her face against a rock, she wept and almost sobbed aloud. Before the paroxysm passed she heard a step, and, looking up, saw Uncle Loren looking down upon her in sorrowful surprise.

"O, uncle, I didn't mean you should see me; I couldn't help it," and she sprang to her feet; but he stood perfectly still and looked at her, with such trouble in his eyes as if, for the first time, he comprehended that she was wretched. "Don't look so, uncle, I wouldn't grieve you for the world; but once in a while I feel as if I couldn't wait any longer to cry. All girls do, I suppose."

"But what do you cry for? what hurts you?"

"Nothing now, uncle; I am happy with you."



"But what did hurt you?"

"O, I can't tell. Don't ask me—please don't!"

"Yes, I want to know." It was seldom he spoke so gravely, and she dropped her eyes in silence. "I want to know," he repeated, gently.

"But you do know, dear uncle, and I cannot put it in words. You must know how hard it is to be fed and clothed and educated by charity, for which you can make no return; and must know how mean I feel to pretend before strangers to be your child, when I know I came, as Aunt Hannah says, from the gutter, and have no parents except a drunken, brutal father and a poor degraded mother."

"But you need not pretend."

"Aunt Hannah says I must."

"And I say you must not," he replied, sternly.

"May I say, then, that I am not your daughter?"

"God knows, I wish I could say that you are, and in his sight you are; you grow morbid, my child, sometimes, and feel you make no return for our care. Do you know, Lina, that you are the comfort and joy of my life; that it has nothing except what you bring into it? Sometimes I am very sorry I took you, for I cannot do for you as I would; but you do more for me by your love, and for Hannah by your work, than we can ever do for you."



"No, no, uncle, don't say that;" for she was ashamed to have forced him to words, when she knew he would have liked so much better to have been understood without speech. "I must be very ungrateful, but I am often so oppressed by thinking of all that is given to me to which I have no claim that I long to go to work and truly to care for myself."

"Well, you may try it, if you feel so, Lina."

"How, uncle, how? and when?"

"Next summer I will let you teach our district school, of which I have the charge. It will let you feel that you are helping little children, and the money you earn by teaching you may use as you like."

"May I? O, uncle, may I?" and she drew near, and finished by a whisper in his ear.

He stroked her hair gently, and the tears sprang into his eyes.

"Yes; you may spend it for your mother, if we can find her, or for the Mission where the little children are."

"O, uncle, I am so glad! I have thought of it so much, and wished that I knew some way to help the children that are left behind to grow up in dreadful ways, while I am here;" and she gave his arm an affectionate squeeze, and laughed through her tears.



"Well, girlie, we will work together, and see if we can't help some of the little ones out of their troubles," he said. "Now we are to get such a good rental from Forest Farm, I can do something more this year."

"Have you been doing for them, Uncle Loren, all these years?" she asked, surprised.

"Well, a trifle every year; but now you shall help, and we will do it together;" and he added, bending lower, "We wont mind much if auntie should scold sometimes; down at the bottom of the heart there's a good deal of love frozen up. Perhaps, by and by, the spring will come. Don't you think we'd better be patient and wait?"

She hung her head and the tears came, but this time tears of shame. How many years he had waited for the spring to come, and he did not grow angry or discouraged or rebel. He did not seem to feel that it was necessary to sweep off the face of creation whatever was hard to bear. But she, too often of late, had let her distaste stir her to anger, and had felt toward Aunt Hannah almost as when she gathered the stones to throw at Matteo's head.

She went on through the forest, lifted up and strengthened. How wise the man had been, in his instinct in teaching, he did not know himself. He



had found her sore, rebellious, sensitive, and with good cause aggrieved. He did not nurse her grievance, nor arouse her resistance or resentment, but applied for her soreness the help he had tested full often for his own. He set her to work to heal the wounds of others, and by stimulating to action the noble purpose he silenced the ignoble complaint; and yet how gladly he would have shielded her from every trial, great or small.



## CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER this there were blessed days at Forest Farm. Mrs. Darrell seemed to welcome the companionship of the girl, and, finding how eager she was for books, let her read to her during some of the sunny afternoons. The house became lovely, under the tasteful touch of their united hands. Before April passed into May, Mr. Beech, the tutor, came. He was a clergyman whose health had forced him from the preacher's to the teacher's desk. He had been a classmate of Mr. Lindsay, and in his hands had been the education of his son. With him he had traveled from time to time, and to his judicious care was due largely the fact that the youth was now well on in his college career. Gentle as he was wise, he was interested at once in the young girl, who told him she was, next summer, to make her first experiment in teaching; and he proposed that she should study with him for the month that would elapse before his pupil should arrive.

To this Uncle Loren consented, though Aunt Hannah grumbled sorely. But Lina only rose the earlier and worked the harder, and when the work



was done, saddled the old white horse with her own hands, and went away by the path over the hill and through the pines to her books. After Loren's talk with her Hannah's sarcasms lost their sting, and she ceased to blame herself for her delight in Mrs. Darrell's motherly tenderness and love.

It was a wonderful May-time to the girl, and in her dual life on the two farms she was happier than she had ever been before. But one afternoon, early in June, when she came over for her lesson, she found the bright little sitting-room deserted. She made her way to the kitchen, where Abigail said Mrs. Darrell has gone for errands to Franconia Village, and Mr. Beech had received a letter asking them to meet young Mr. Lindsay at the Profile Station, where he was expected to arrive that afternoon. They told Abigail to ask Miss Lina to wait. She was glad the pupil was coming, though she felt an instinctive misgiving about her future lessons, and thought she would probably now be forced to get on alone.

Turning it over half-sorrowfully in her mind, she decided to leave a note for Mrs. Darrell, and to return, when Abigail burst upon the piazza with,

“My goodness! Miss Lina, here's a young feller come all alone on horseback over from Bethlehem.



He's come to visit Mr. Lindsay, and thought he'd leave the cars there and ride over the hills. My goodness, what am I to do?"

"Why, nothing, Abigail; don't be flurried; the others will soon be here."

"But I don't know what room Mrs. Darrell wants made ready for him. She didn't say nothin' about expectin' him, and I s'pose he's hungry as a bear; them city folks is allers hungry enough to eat a body out o' house and home, and I'm keeping my good vittles for supper."

"O, never mind, Abigail, I'll help you about the room, and you can get him something without disturbing the supper."

"But I don't want to," said the maiden, with a frown. "Mrs. Darrell's got every thing baked up new, and I do begrudge one er them new pies, and"—

"Hush," said Lina, warningly, for a quick step sounded on the grass, and the next moment, hat in hand, his face bright with half-hidden merriment—for he had heard every word—approached a broad-shouldered young man, with a frank smile, that was of itself an apology for intrusion.

"I am unexpected, I see," he said, "though I thought to find Mrs. Darrell at home. I will wait for her here, with your permission."



A quick flush passed over Lina's face, a strange choking sensation filled her throat; for, changed as he was, she recognized, in the broad-shouldered, well-clad young man, the news-boy who had stood between her and her brutal father, the "Don," who had saved her and her precious half-dollar, from which she had not parted yet.

She tried to speak, but the words did not come; and, as if to relieve her embarrassment, he chatted on: "I could not resist the impulse to come across the hills, for I have never in my life had a holiday among them. So I left the train, and dined at Bethlehem"—this in a louder tone, with a smile toward the door, behind which Abigail was watching him through the crack—"and rode over. I shall ride back to-morrow morning, and leave the horse, and walk home."

"Is it your first sight of the mountains?" asked Lina, in a voice hardly yet under control.

"Yes, and Ralph would take no refusal this time; so I have run away for a month of rest."

"Only a month?"

"Only a month for me. Ralph stays all summer, poor fellow, and I hope it will do wonders for him in the way of health. He has the noblest soul in the world; but it has been a struggle to keep it in the body, ever since he was hurt."



“What was it that hurt him?” asked the girl, innocently; “his father told my uncle he was injured.”

“Well, it is a long story, and my blood always boils when I tell it; and it will seem incredible to you, brought up here among the hills, that such misery and wickedness could exist in the city; but Ralph”— Suddenly he paused, her face was pale, her eyelids fluttered wearily; she did not need to hear the tale, she knew it all. She was marveling at herself that she could have been so idiotic as not to know before. This name “Lindsay,” how could she have forgotten it? “Ralph,” surely she had known that name; and this was Ralph—the boy who had been hurt in trying to save her from abuse that night so long ago. It was Ralph’s home in which she passed the night; that seemed now like a dream. It was the face of Ralph’s father which had haunted her with its familiar look. It was Mrs. Darrell whose countenance she had seen shining through the hospital gate. And he, this young man of whose noble mind and heroic soul she had been hearing so long—whose persistence in study, despite acute pain—whose patient endurance of his fate in the long battle with weakness had made him so beloved by all who knew him—this was the boy who owed his life of suffering to his defense of her.



"You are frightened—you are faint. Let me bring you something."

"No, thank you. I was faint a little, but it has passed away, I have often felt so before."

"Well, I startled you by making you believe the story I have to tell was more horrible than it is."

"No, no, that was not it, indeed, indeed. I know the story."

"O! yes, Mrs. Darrell or Mr. Beech has told you; they must be always talking of it. Well, then, you can imagine how dear he is to Mrs. Darrell. She nursed him through years when he could hardly walk, for his spine was injured; and she was a real mother to him, both before and after his own mother died. His mother was ill at the time of the accident, you know, and she has since died, leaving Ralph and one little daughter, who has been in Mrs. Darrell's care, and they have all learned to love her, so that they cannot let her go; and so she is one of them now for all time."

"And you, did you say you did not know her?"

"I have seen her; but I do not know her well. If you have heard the story of Ralph's accident, I must tell you that I am Donald Lawrence, the little ragamuffin of a newsboy that they called 'Don.' I suppose I was as much of a scamp as the rest of the chaps that live in the streets, and lodged at the News-



boys' Home ; but I wasn't the fellow who hurt Ralph, though they arrested me for being in the fight, and brought me before the police-court, and, on the testimony of the little girl's father, a drunken scoundrel, who said I had robbed his child in the street, and on that of Jack, the real offender in the scrape, who swore against me, I was sent to the Island for three months. But Mr. Brace—you know all about Brace—well, he'll be monarch over a kingdom of boys in heaven, I am sure, who will all be eager to march under him to save the naughty boys left here below. He had been my friend at the Newsboys' Home—had been like a father to me from the night I took refuge there, and he thought it strange that I should have done so disgraceful a thing, after all his kindness and care. So he never gave it up till he got to the bottom of the affair. He found Jack, he found the Lindsays, he found the truth, I don't know how, and, bless his heart, he came down to the Island himself to welcome me back again to their midst. But I am telling you about myself, when I meant to tell the story of my friend."

"O! go on, I beg you will go on," said Lina, holding her breath.

"Well, of course, I was a sort of a hero among the hundreds of boys after that; and this circumstance enabled me to become a leader among them; and,



thanks to my love for my benefactor, I wanted to lead them to be men, to lead them away from mean words and ways. The experience at the Island, a place where a prison and an insane asylum stand side by side, both filled by victims of vice and crime, the sight of the depths to which men and women may fall, acted upon me like an inspiration. I felt from that time that I knew from what Mr. Brace wanted to save us; and from that day I've been fighting under his banner, and working under and with him with all my heart."

"But, you are"—she hesitated and paused.

He laughed. "You mean I am not a newsboy now? No, not now, thanks to Mr. Lindsay, who, choosing to consider me a martyr in the cause of his son, gave me a place in his counting-room, where I have been in his service ever since. As soon as Ralph was strong enough, he took me to see him, and we came to be like brothers. I could not do enough for him, I felt so sorry for him, and he never seemed able to do enough for me. When his mother died I was with him day and night; and what Ralph learned in the day from Mr. Beech, he taught me in the evening, and so, without much of school, I have managed to get on. Mr. Lindsay has given me every chance. He would have taken me from work for school, but I didn't want it; I preferred to keep at



work, and promised him if he would let me keep my post I would surely learn all that was needed to make me a merchant. Mr. Brace, too, thought it better for me to be independent."

"And you still try to help him in leisure hours?"

"Yes, I am a sort of a watch-dog for him. I am never so happy as when I am helping some little chap out of the gutter. Ralph likes it, too: usually he supplies the money, and I do the work. For example, we are going to bring up a score of the weakly little fellows this summer from the city, and let them camp out about here, and I am to take charge of their fun and frolic. The railroads give them low rates of fare, and Ralph supplies tents, camp-beds, and food, and Mrs. Darrell will mother them. I feel as if I were not more than ten years old when I think of it. The little monkeys will be wild with delight, and I shall have all that I can do to keep them from breaking their necks."



## CHAPTER XIV.

THE rumble of wheels on the bridge in the valley, half a mile below, broke in upon the eager gestures and the heartily told tale, and Lina rose suddenly to go.

“What a stupid fellow I am!” he said, hastily rising, “to keep you listening to all this.”

“I assure you I only long to hear more,” she answered earnestly; “it seems to me the most blessed work of which I have ever heard; but I must go home now, for I have overstayed my time.”

“Don’t you live here? I thought you were the young lady in whom Mrs. Darrell had found a companion and friend.”

“Mrs. Darrell has certainly been very kind in letting me share her home, but I live with my Uncle Wilde, near Honey Hill, above Franconia.”

“Honey Hill; that should be a sweet place.”

“It’s a busy one, certainly, but it derives its name from the many maple-trees, from which the sugar is made, and that is honey sweet.”

He untied the old horse, and helped her to mount him, an act which she had done alone ever since she



grew too tall for Uncle Loren to lift her in his arms and swing her to the saddle; but she was hardly out of sight in the woodland path behind the barn before the rattling wheels sounded at the gate and Ralph and Mrs. Darrell had arrived.

And that ride through the woodland road, what a ride it was! For a long time the forest had been a temple for Lina's communing with herself and with God. Often had the hour spent in passing from one house to the other been one of earnest, though unconscious, effort to adjust herself to the complex demands of her life. Here she had battled to forget Hannah's harshness, to forget her childhood's degradation, her father's cruelty, her mother's loneliness in some garret of the great city. Here she had tried to stifle her sense of duty to go and find her mother, to save her father; or tried to forgive herself for caring less about this formerly cherished and secret hope, now that she had the new home and the new friends! Here she had sought to pray out and to think out the many problems that press, no one knows how sorely, upon the mind and heart of thoughtful girlhood. All this was a part of her daily journey to and fro. But to-day she had been pushed forward years into a new world of whirling thoughts, memories, and emotions. She was older by years—she saw the lives of those on whose history her own childish life



had had its effect coming out into beauty and use. Ralph had suffered all these years for her; the pain of it was unutterable, and wrung her as no sorrow ever yet had done.

It had lasted years, and it could not be undone. He had been crippled, wounded, sore with pain, known sleepless nights and anguished days. He could not run or work or play with the lads; his education had cost a fight with misery, and she had been the cause. And why did God let her know it, when she could not, if she gave her life, find any way to give back his years? How gladly she would do it, if she could! but she had nothing, could do nothing, could be nothing but a girl, an uneducated country girl, picked from the gutters and reared by the charity of a woman who did not love her, and whom she did not love.

Yet, out of all his pain, here was patience and nobility and strength and sweetness for Ralph. Out of Donald's wretched childhood, as wretched and hard as hers, here was the blessing to the needy, the benediction and inspiration to others who were still suffering and in want. But she—out of her little life, what was to come?

It was all wrong—she knew it as she went on, telling it in broken whispers to the pines. She was morbid and weak, but she had been stirred to the



depths of her nature by the revelations of the day, and she was very young, and, as she said to herself, "only a poor little girl."

She was silent and pale after she came home, and Loren noticed her agitation, though she tried not to have him see it. She was late also, and Hannah was cross; but her snappish words fell on unheeding ears.

Loren noticed, too, that day after day passed by and she did not go to the Forest Farm again.

Hannah wondered also, but said to Loren that it was "jest as well to wait a spell, may be, and see whether the city lady would come to see her," when Loren suggested that it was Hannah's place to visit Mrs. Darrell.

"Guess she'll wait a spell if she waits for me," said Hannah, with a sniff of contempt. "I've no call to make Mrs. Darrell's acquaintance. I've lived sixty years without city folks, and I reckon I can hold out a spell longer."

From remarks like these they knew that the old jealousy had her in its grasp, and they wisely forbore frequent mention of the people at Forest Farm. Lina still had occasional afternoons with Mrs. Darrell; but she generally took occasion when Loren had mentioned that the young men were off among the mountains, or shooting in the woods. She had



seen Ralph but once. She was not at home when he came over one day, with Mr. Beech and Donald, to see his landlord.

But one Sunday morning, when she arrived early at church, and saw the congregation gather, consisting of smartly-dressed villagers; of farmers' families who seemed uneasy in their Sunday clothes; of children whose toes could not reach the floor from the high uncushioned seats; of maidens in pink ribbons, and bashful half-grown men, she failed to notice a stranger, who entered with the rest.

Her seat was among the choir, which was led by a stalwart, gray-haired farmer, who in winter kept the singing-school; and as singing had ever since the days in the mission-school been her delight, Lina was the old man's staff and stay. When, however, the first hymn was read, and the choir blundered and did not follow where she led, a fine clear tenor voice from the body of the house joined the singer's, and went on with hers, upbearing all the rest; while her heart beat fast, her voice trembled, though she dared not lift her eyes. How she knew whose was the voice that had helped them through she never could tell, but she did know, even before she glanced at the strange face in Uncle Loren's slip. A tall, slender figure, supported by a cane; a strong, patient face, with some marks of suffering in the lines about



the mouth; a shapely head, crowned with brown curls—strange how familiar they all were, and how clearly under these outlines she traced the face which seven or eight years before she had seen lying on the pillows in his father's house.

When she came out on the porch he stood talking to Uncle Loren, who was waiting for her, and who presented her in his simple way, and asked the stranger to take a seat in his carriage.

"No, thanks; I am going to stay for a look at the children in the Sunday-school. Mr. Lawrence is going to bring his twenty boys from the camp, and they are so wild on happy week-days that I fear it will take us both to keep them quiet on Sundays."

"The experiment is a successful one, then?" said Lina.

"Yes, indeed, they are all having their first sight of the country, and their first real holiday. Don is their ideal man, their hero, and he is their pilot on all their tramps. They are all going to dine in the house to-morrow, and Abigail is crazed with preparations. Mrs. Darrell said she was going to send me to ask you to come over and help to entertain them. We are all boys together, and she wants them to have the civilizing influence of another lady."

"Thank you, I shall, indeed, be glad to come," she answered; and as she drove home her heart was



strangely happy and strangely sad ; happy, for in the young face was so much more of vigor and courage and energy of health than she had thought to see ; and sad, because she yet saw, through the beaming eyes, the traces of suffering endured.

On Monday she went to dinner among the boys. They were each dressed in a new suit of clothes, which Mrs. Darrell had provided, with the help of Lina and of the girls of her Sunday-school class, and even of Aunt Hannah herself, who had taken real interest in this work. They were all on their best behavior ; and, with Mrs. Darrell at one end of the table and Mr. Beech at the other, and the young people midway, Donald by Lina and Ralph opposite, it was, indeed, a happy company. After the meal was over they had a social, merry time in the parlor, talking, singing, laughing, with a hearty, happy enjoyment of the hour. Lina was surprised at their good manners, remembering her terror of the boys of the street ; but, treated like gentlemen, all the instinctive gentleness that, cultivated, makes the truest breeding, was in its fullest exercise.

When Mr. Beech thought they were tired, he gave them a little talk about the fungi and the mosses and lichens, showing them through the microscope the beauty of specimens such as might be collected in the woods. Then Donald told them of a mass of



mosses that he had seen depending from the pines near Mr. Wilde's house, and before their eyes had done brightening the hay-wagon was brought to the gate, and Don told them he would drive them over to the Point, and perhaps let them secure some of the mosses. Away they went, with two horses and the hay-cart, and one after another of the boys taking his turn to drive. The farmers nodded cheerily as they rattled swiftly down the road, glad to see the little fellows enjoying themselves. And when they reached the wood, and saw the green mosses clinging high upon the trees, there was a wild scramble and shout at the foot, and a struggle as to who should climb; when Don interfered, and reminded the boys that they were in their new suits of clothes, which were to be taken back to New York with them when they returned.

They yielded, but several still looked longingly at the treasure, and Donald, eager to have them gratified, pulled off his coat. "Wait a moment, boys, and I'll have it down for you;" and away he went scrambling up the trunk of a tree, while a shout arose from the group below.

It was a high tree; and, as he went up, he pulled off cluster after cluster of moss, and threw it down; but by the time he reached the branches he was tired, and rested a moment on a branch near the



trunk, before going out on the boughs for beautiful bunches that clothed some of the smaller limbs.

Then, moving cautiously, he crept out, steadying himself by the bough, when, suddenly, it gave an ominous crack that made the boys utter a warning shout. It came too late. Donald made one effort to return; but the limb was rotten at the heart, and, with a cruel crash, it fell, and in their midst lay the insensible form of their friend.



## CHAPTER XV.

WITH white faces and trembling hands, they tried to lift him in their arms and bear him to the wagon which was waiting in the forest road ; several of them ran swiftly down the path to Loren's house, and with his help Donald was borne gently to the cart, and the horses led slowly down the hill to the house of Hannah Wilde.

Hannah was in a state of great excitement, but she flew hither and thither with her usual energy ; and, while the boys fled for the doctor, Don was laid in what had been the room of Loren's mother.

When consciousness returned, and he found where he was, he tried to rise, but the doctor gently bade him be quiet. Besides many bruises, the left arm was broken, and it was not until the bone had been set that Lina came. She had walked home, and Mrs. Darrell and Ralph had accompanied her as far as the foot of the hill, whence Ralph had returned, and Mrs. Darrell had gone to see Abigail's mother, who was ill. Loren bade Lina try to quiet Aunt Hannah's nervousness, and drove away swiftly him-



self down through the village, and out to Forest Farm. Mrs. Darrell had not yet come in. Returning quickly, he passed the little church-yard where his mother lay, and his heart went back in thought to the days before she died. Her grave was near that of Esther's father and mother, who had been buried here, as Wiltonby was their early home, though he had been the pastor of a neighboring parish when he died.

As Loren gazed that way, his mind full of memory of the two, he saw a moving figure in the twilight, lingering between the graves of his mother and of hers. He paused, looked again: some one was there, passing softly among the graves, but returning ever, and lingering between those two. He remembered that Mrs. Darrell was in the village; and, thinking it possible the quiet might have drawn her hither, he stopped the horses, descended, and leaned for a moment on the gate. Ashamed of his curiosity, yet held by a strange fascination to the spot, he was about to turn away, when the figure moved swiftly toward him in the dusk. He meant to go; but still he waited, and, in a moment more, the two stood face to face. "Is it Mrs. Darrell?" was on his lips; but she lifted her veil, and he said:

"Good heavens, Esther, is it you?"



"Yes, Loren; I am Mrs. Darrell to the people here, but I am the Esther you knew."

He grasped the railings of the fence, his serious face working convulsively, and his voice shook:

"Esther! Esther!" he said, as if it were too much for him to believe. "Esther, what does it mean? How is it that you are here?" and he bowed his face upon his hands, and shook like a leaf in the wind.

Although much agitated, she was the calmer of the two.

"Loren, I am Mrs. Darrell to these people; I have seen none of the old neighbors. I have not come to force myself upon the knowledge of any of them; I have nothing but sorrow to tell, and I cannot bear to have them pity me. Keep my secret for me, Loren."

"Yes, yes," he said; and suddenly recollecting the errand for which he sought her, he told her of Donald's fall, and begged her to come to the house.

With a strange pang of pain, which for a moment overcame the emotion at meeting Loren, she took her place at his side, and they went swiftly on through the gathering darkness to his home.

He told her of the accident, and reassured her as to any fatal result; but she trembled violently, and it was not until the carriage reached the gate that the thought of Hannah entered her mind. Then she



paused in distress. He waited, too, with his hand upon the gate.

“Do you think Hannah will know me, Loren?”

“I do not know; perhaps you will not see her. Do you mind if she should know you?”

“Only for this family’s sake, Loren; for Ralph and Donald I would not like it. I am not ready to let them be curious and pitiful toward me. They know nothing of my past life.”

He hesitated.

“And I know nothing of the life since your father died. I wrote then.”

“Yes, I remember; I wrote and told you of our troubles and poverty; did you not receive my word?”

“No; no word ever came to me from you after I sent that news.”

“Well, you shall know all, my friend, but”—she hesitated—“but when, and where? I meant to see you; I have something to say to you which I meant to say before I left, and I will find an hour. Let us go in now: I thought I saw a figure moving in the shrubbery there.”

“No, there’s no one there,” he said; but, after they passed within the door, a swift figure glided from behind the lilac bushes by the fence.

Hannah, excited and tired, had been waiting for Loren there, and her old jealousy smitten heart had



met a dreadful blow. She went round to the back door, and stood a moment on the door-step, but she could not go in.

“Hannah, Hannah!” It was Loren’s voice calling her, and she darted away down the path, and stood behind the curb of the old brown well, just in the shadow of the apple-trees.

“She must have gone to her room, uncle,” she heard Lina say, in a gentle voice, “and we need not disturb her; she is much excited and distressed by the accident, and dreaded, I think, to meet a stranger.”

Poor Hannah! for once she was grateful to the girl; and she breathed freer in her hiding-place. She was dumb with distress and astonishment. Loren had deceived her all the time. She was back again, this dreadful Esther Burgess; and it was not that he had given her up, but that she was so near him, that made him so calm and patient and kind.

One swift suspicion followed another with demoniacal rapidity through her mind. He had followed her through all the years; he had planned to bring her to his own house. He had taken the opportunity to go for her to-night himself, when he could have sent one of the boys. He had planned that she should have the teaching and influence over his adopted child.

Ah, yes! she understood it now. After awhile



Loren would leave her a helpless old woman, who had loved him, and him only, all her life long. He would go, and would take Lina also. In an agony of self-pity at this woe that had fallen upon her old gray head, there was this added pang, that Loren, after all, did not love or care for her in the least; he was only waiting for her to die, working in secret, because then, her hoarded property would be his and this girl's, and, with it, they would enrich the woman they both loved.

The wind whispered soothingly in the apple-trees, but she did not hear it; the stars came out over the mountains, but she did not see them. Before her eyes was only a picture of a lone old woman, robbed of her boy; and in her ears an evil spirit was whispering a tale that was far blacker than the truth. Possessed of a desire to see again the hated face, she drew her calico apron over her head, and crept round to the end of the house, up to the open window of the room where Donald lay asleep. Over his pillow bent Esther's face, full of loving anxiety, gentle enough and sad enough to have disarmed any hatred. She was bathing his head. Sometimes he moved uneasily, and half-opened his eyes. When he met the tender look bent down upon him, he said, half-deliriously, not yet free from the dreamy influence of the quieting draft given him by the doctor,



"Is this heaven?" and, watching her intently, "are you my mother?"

"No, I am not your mother; but I lost my boy, and he looked so much like you, that I sometimes almost feel I have him back again."

Again his eyes closed, and he drowsed. And the tears came into the eyes that watched him so tenderly, all unheeding these other burning and angry eyes that through the slats of the shutters were gazing upon them both.

A restless moment, and he woke again. This time, conscious of who it was that bent above him, he smiled, and said:

"I dreamed I was with my mother; but I fancy it was your face that I saw."

"Then go to sleep and dream it again; for you must not talk, you know; and I will be your mother for to-night."

He opened his eyes wide, and looked at her:

"While I am sick, will you be my mother?"

"Yes, and after you are well, if you wish it."

He looked long and steadily at her, and whispered, "Kiss me, then."

She bowed her head, with her eyes full of tears, and kissed his forehead. Then, shutting his lids softly with her fingers, she kissed them down, and he sighed a great restful sigh, and slept.



Then the woman who watched him wept softly, and the woman who watched her grew white in her wrath.

“What was she, that pale-faced, puny creature, that all that was young and beautiful should love her, while she—” a movement aroused her attention, the door of the sick-room opened, and Loren’s face appeared.

“Is he sleeping?”

“Yes,” was the whispered answer.

“Will you not go to rest? and I will watch him.”

“No, I do not need to rest; but I will go out on the porch awhile for the air, and you may sit by the window here, where you can tell me if he stirs.”

A moment later she was on the porch, and Loren had brought a shawl and wrapped it around her, and he himself had taken the seat within.

But Hannah saw it all; the chairs were so near—hers without and his within—that they could talk in a subdued tone, without fear of disturbing the sleeper’s rest.

And they did talk; and in the hall, crouched by the window adjoining the one where Loren sat, still as death, his half-frantic sister sat and heard the story—every word.



## CHAPTER XVI.

LOREN listened, but he was very still; it was no time to remind this suffering woman of his buried and now reviving love; and he hid his pang as she went on, at the assurance that came to him that she went away in her girlhood without loving him, or knowing how he loved her. He felt sure she loved the man she married, and loved his memory still; that she spoke to him as her own and her father's old friend, and not as a lover to whom she had returned.

She told him briefly what we already know of the battle with misfortune in Italy, and all that followed the effort to come to this land. She told him of the wreck of the steamer and the death of her husband and her boy; of her long and terrible illness in the hospital.

"When I recovered, months had passed," she said. "I had no money, and no heart to return here; for my mother and father both were gone, and I knew that many of the neighbors felt I was cruel to marry and leave them alone. Then, I had no money, and no hope in the world of any thing but finding my



Stella, my little baby girl. For weeks after I was brought to the hospital, in the fever that burned my senses out, I cried for my children; but so incoherent was I, that they did not know whether I mourned son or daughter, or both.

“The steward who had brought me from the steamer to the hospital gave my name as he had it from the list of passengers; but after we sailed I changed my state-room with a Mrs. Darrell, in order to take into mine the Italian woman who was to nurse my child, and my name was thus transferred from the ship’s to the hospital record as Mrs. Darrell.

“Still, the good doctor sought the steamship, sought the stewardess and captain, both of whom remembered there was a Mrs. Darrell, and never questioned when the doctor associated the name with the lady who had been taken ill on board. The stewardess remembered the Italian woman who had taken charge of the child, the steerage list gave her name, but no directory contained it, and no search in the Italian quarter of the city revealed the hiding-place of the woman.

“On recovery, Doctor Frost told me all this: told me he could not let me go from his care till he was sure I was well, and that if I wished employment, he would secure light work for me in the children’s ward. I think he saw, in the diversion of this care,



my only chance of health and vigor, for he gave me first one and then more convalescent little ones to love and nurse and pet.

“My heart revived somewhat from its sadness; and when he thought I was ready for it, he came one morning and told me of an accident that had befallen the only son of a dear friend, and of his mother, who was too ill to nurse him, and who begged me to take charge of the boy.

“I came then to Mr. Lindsay’s home, and I have loved his boy and his little girl, but the love has never stifled my hunger for my own. Motherhood has devoured my life. I have done my duty in my place, and been grateful for the shelter and comfort of a refined Christian home; but I have had also an intense life of longing for my own, out of which has grown an enlarged love embracing childhood everywhere. I have been especially drawn to the children of the suffering and the poor, and have seen in every boy and girl something that might have belonged to me.

“Though I know my boy went down into the sea with his father, I fancy I see his lineaments in every face. That young man there is like what I think he must have grown to be, and I find an attachment in my heart to him that is almost beyond control. In every girl that crosses my path I see my daughter;



and sometimes I fear my desire has turned my brain, for in this child of yours, this Lina, there are looks and ways that often make my heart cry out and claim her for my own."

Loren started and winced; he had not won Esther; she did not, indeed, never had loved him. He could never hope to win her. Was he to lose his Lina, too? And Hannah, from her window, fairly clenched her hands, and shook with fear and rage. If she could, if she dared, she would have laid violent hands on this woman, who, having nothing, yet claimed and took all, and she would have driven her from her gates.

But Esther did not hear the voices, sad or sinful, whispering in each heart. She went on eagerly, and said,

"This is what I wanted to see you for; this is what I wanted to say. I do not know where you found her; though, as you had no brothers or sisters, I know she cannot be your niece. Tell me, do you know her parentage?"

"No," said Loren, with a gasp; "but the people at the Mission did. Her father and mother are both alive, and he is a drunkard, from whose cruelty the Mission had given her protection. I have tried to have her forget that she is not mine; and I don't think she remembers much."

"Then there is no hope here," she replied, with



sadness. "And yet, though I have followed many clues; though I have lived a second life among the orphans and the poor working-girls of the city, and have often and often found one that I could have taken to my heart, if I could have proved her mine, this is the only child that I could have taken, whether I had any proof or not. Once with my arms about her, and her voice calling me "mother," I think I could be content to seek no longer for my child."

"And she would be happy with you, no doubt," said Loren, sadly. There was nothing he would not give to see them happy, these two, the only beings he loved; yet somehow he could not say, just yet, "Take her; she shall be indeed your child."

It seemed cruel—why, why should he not be able to keep them both? And then he thought of Hannah, and was still.

"Was there nothing by which you could identify the child? You surely did not come from Italy with nothing?"

"No, but I never saw my trunk, and I had made a parcel containing my Bible and other little treasures and trifles, and some of the baby's clothes. All of hers were marked with a star. Her father named her Esther, and the Italians call that Stella, which means 'a star.' This the Italian woman called Stel-lina, 'a little star,' and about each of my children's



necks there hung an AMBER STAR, of trifling value, given them by their Italian nurse in Rome, who placed it on the baby's neck, to keep off what she called the 'Evil eye.' Then, to please her, I promised her that it should not be taken off the baby until she got another like it for my little boy. I have no doubt but that she had them both blessed by the priest. I have often thought it possible that the stars might not have been lost, for poor people—Italians especially—are very superstitious about such charms, believing that they protect from danger, disease, and death."

There was a silence; then Loren said, gently:

"I wish I could help you, Esther; and though I see no reason to hope, yet all inquiries shall be made, and the child's memory put to the test. Should it prove that my treasure is yours, I should surrender her at once; and, meantime, I can only be grateful to you for the motherly influence which you have exerted over her heart and mind. May I ask if you mean to declare yourself now, or if you dislike to be known by your own name?"

"I have always regretted the soreness and pain that prevented my telling the doctor at the outset that the name was not mine. But he had grown accustomed to think and to speak of me as Mrs. Darrell before I knew it. It was not until I had been



recommended to the Lindsays under that name that I knew of the error on the books. My whole nature was smarting and sore under my sorrow. The name did not seem of any consequence to me. It seemed like being dead to my old wretched self, and alive only in my love and pity for God's children. The time to have told the Lindsays was at first; but in their great trouble, Mrs. Lindsay was too ill for me to obtrude upon her my tale of woe. Toward the father I felt timid, and hesitated; and after a time abandoned the purpose to tell. It troubles me sometimes, because it is not true; but, for the rest, it has done no harm, and I am quite accustomed to the name now. I love my young friends, and I cannot bear to show them the gulf of sorrow from which I have climbed to their hearts. I feel as if, when they knew all, I should have to run away and hide from the pity of them all."

"Isn't that morbid, Esther? How could they help loving you more for what you have had to endure?"

"I don't know, Loren; I only feel alive in one part of my nature. Should I find my child, I could feel again as if life had hope and joy; but now, while I submit, I am so sorely bereft, that I am like some desert mother, who tries to assuage her desolation by the care of all the motherless within the



camp, and when they need her no more, creeps away into the shadow of the rocks to die."

She wept, and Loren could have wept with her, yet he knew that there was but one healing for her heart. No loving voice, but one that said "Mother" to her, could comfort a grief like hers.

Donald moved and stirred uneasily. Esther started to go to his side. Hannah heard her step, and felt the rustle of her garments as she swept past the window where she crouched. She resisted the half-insane desire to seize her in her wrath; and then, when the door of the sick-room closed, and Loren came out and passed on to his chamber, she arose and staggered away to her bed, to wear out the night in sleepless tossing and pain.

How much she was capable of hating any one she never knew till now. Had she been the tenderest of mothers to Lina, she would not have been more outraged that any one should claim the child; yet how to thwart and defeat her enemy she did not know.

She lay and tossed and moaned, as if already she were bereft of child and brother. Then, as if she had taken a sudden resolution, she arose; and, taking from the cupboard a long gray cloak, she put it over her night-dress. Then over her head she drew a black silk hood; and, looking, with the wrinkled face



and gleaming eyes and heavy brows, like a witch of some old story, she crept softly forth. Not back again to the sick-room this time, for she could hear Loren's tread pacing his chamber softly up and down; but up the creaking back stairs, and through a long chamber over the shed, filled with unused furniture, and hung around the rafters with bunches of seed-corn and herbs. On through this room and a little corridor beyond, to a half-opened door, where she paused. Beyond was Lina's room. There, in the little white bed by the window, with her face turned slightly toward the wall, and her arms thrown carelessly over the coverlet, the girl was lying asleep.

The first gray of the early dawn stole in at the window; and, even in her moment of determination to do her a great wrong, a consciousness of how beautiful the girl had become stole into the aged heart. Surely the kisses of that rosy mouth and the clasp of clinging arms like those might gladden any desolate mother's heart; but she whose right they were should never have them—never while Hannah could prevent. And while there was one chance, one proof, Hannah could never know a moment's rest. Was not the girl her own? Had she not worked for Lina all these years?"

Smothering every relenting, the gray figure stole softly over the list carpet that covered the floor, and



gently laid back the coverlet with stealthy touch. There on the white neck of the girl, lay a string of golden beads. They had belonged to Loren's mother, and he had given them, on one sacred anniversary of his mother's death, to Lina. And she had loved them, and had worn them ever since, only adding as a pendant an Amber Star, which she had formerly worn attached to a cord. When years ago Aunt Hannah had discovered this, and told her it was a heathenish notion to wear any such charm, the child had clung to it, and begged that it should not be removed. Now Hannah remembered it; and when she saw it rising and falling with the regular breathing of the child, she could hardly refrain from a little triumphant cry.

There it was: Esther Burgess should never find it. Quick as thought, she severed the string, picked up the star, and glided from the room.

Was it a dream? Or did Lina's eyes opening in the gray dawn see the form of Aunt Hannah creeping through the corridor to the shed chamber? She thought she saw her, and started up half-awake, half-conscious of a fear that Don might be worse, and that she was wanted; then fell back again, lost in a happy dream of a young face looking at her from Uncle Loren's seat in church, and of a voice that came up to join her own in praise of God. But



the voice and face were not those of the sufferer, Don.

Hannah was unusually still and grim in the morning, and as Lina went about her work, she saw the old woman looked worn and tired.

Poor auntie ! it was hard for her to have such a shock as that of yesterday ; she was not strong, so Lina thought, resolving to love and help her more. Going out to brush the leaves from the porch, she saw Ralph sitting there in the arm-chair, near Donald's window, where last night Esther had sat and talked so long. The pony carriage was at the gate. Ashamed of the color that rose to her cheeks, she went forward and greeted him.

"I could not sleep, Miss Wilde," he said ; "so drove over early to see how Donald is, and to take Mrs. Darrell home."

"He has had a comfortable night, I believe, but you surely will not take Mrs. Darrell home till you have breakfasted ? My aunt"—she was going to say—"my aunt will be so glad to have you with us," but she checked herself. Aunt Hannah's face did not look that morning as if she would be glad.

"No, thank you ; I have seen her, and she thinks the fresh air will give her an appetite. I shall return and take her place by Donald's bed to-day, if your uncle and aunt will allow me, for Mrs. Darrell needs



rest. I wanted to be here last night; but our boys in camp were so distressed, that I could not leave them alone."

"So you have been all night out in the field?" she said, suddenly taking alarm for his health.

"O, that is nothing. I could not sleep, and Don's boys were a comfort. It's amazing how they love him. Why, he can make of them just the sort of men he will."

"It is glorious work to do," she said, thoughtfully, under the breath, looking away to the mountains upon whose summit the sun was scattering the clouds, while the mists still stealthily crept along the vale.

How beautiful she was—as she stood there under the vines, with the thoughtful look in her eyes, born of the desire to be doing such work as Don could do—she did not know; but Ralph did, and as he drove to the hill with Mrs. Darrell, he was tempted to say to her, "That girl is like the morning-glories in the sweetness and freshness of her beauty;" but somehow the words died on his lips unspoken.

"Them city folks wouldn't stay to breakfast, after all," said Aunt Hannah to Loren, as he passed through the room.

"Not stay! Well, of course not, if you didn't invite them," he answered, sharply. "You are the mistress of the house."



“Well, I’ve got the vittles, that’s my part. I left the manners to you and Lina. Besides, who s’posed they would want to sneak off before daylight? I shouldn’t do that, if I’d done nothin’ to be ashamed of.”

“They have only just now gone,” said Loren; “they asked for you, and seemed fearful that they had made you ill. They felt your kindness in taking them in,” he added, soothingly, seeing how gray and hard and suffering her wrinkled old face appeared.

“Well, they needn’t trouble about me—nobody needn’t,” she said, harshly; and Loren, who could not account for her mood in any other way, began to wonder if she could have seen and recognized Esther; or, dreadful thought, “could she have heard their talk last night?”

He dismissed his fear, however, and was as gentle and soothing as possible, though she repelled all reproach with an angry bitterness that seemed beyond control.

Ralph came back, arriving at the same time with the doctor, who came on his morning visit. Donald seemed bright, and to be suffering but little pain, so little that the physician said that if there was no return of fever, he might after two or three days return to the Forest Farm. For Aunt Hannah’s sake



Lina was glad; for she seemed in no condition to carry an added work or care; but for her own sake she was sorry. The house was another spot to her with Don lying there, brave and patient and smiling; and Ralph moving about as gently as a woman, but creating by his very presence a new atmosphere for the girl.



## CHAPTER XVII.

YOUTH had come into the old house, happy, not burdened youth, and Loren felt it, and Lina felt it; and, never recognized by either, love had come in with youth, and for two young hearts under the gray farm-house roof the world was transfigured, indeed.

And indeed it needed to be transfigured, if the poor girl was to live in it with Aunt Hannah for a companion. The latter was untiring in labor; broths and soups of the best kinds were made for Donald; and Ralph, who came to their table, really carried about him an atmosphere of kindness hard to resist. She quite melted in his presence into sociability, but only to go back more fiercely than ever to the injured look and manner when he was not in sight.

Strange as it may seem, a whole day passed, and it was not until Lina was ready to retire that she missed the little star. It was the one relic of another life to her; and she had held it precious, rather because it was all that she had, than for any association it revived. She tried to remember what she had done, that could have severed the star from the beads; but



no explanation arose to her mind. She examined the beads, and was startled when she found that the narrow ribbon from which the trinket had hung had been cut raggedly across. It was not worn; there was no thin spot; but unquestionably it had been cut. Some one had done it, and it must have been done in her sleep. Swift as thought her mind went back to the image of Aunt Hannah that had broken through her dream: "Could she have taken it? for what reason?" She remembered that she had brought to the farm-house a little fashion of grasping it in her hand, when she said her prayers—a fashion caught from seeing Felicia with her rosary—and that Aunt Hannah called this a popish, heathenish habit, and hit her knuckles whenever she found her doing it, until she learned to let it alone. "Could Aunt Hannah have taken it?" If so, she must be unsettled in her mind, which would account for the bitterness and suspicion she seemed to exercise lately toward both Loren and herself.

So she resolved to be gentler and more pitying toward the old woman, to look about for her little treasure, and if she could not find it, to submit patiently to its loss, but on no account to irritate her aunt. She, poor soul, was torn between her desire to pour upon them all the vials of her wrath, and her assurance that this would only hasten the catastrophe



she dreaded. She parted with Donald kindly; but set to work to scrub the room and air the bed, as if some pestilent disease had found shelter under the roof. She devised every means to keep Lina too busy to go to the Forest Farm, so that the girl's opportunities of seeing her friends were rare; and when the others came to see her she showed impatience, sometimes to Donald, always to Ralph, whose gentle ways she ceased to feel when she saw that Lina felt them too. All seemed to her to be a part of the same conspiracy to take the girl away.

So the summer swiftly passed, and the last days were less happy than the first. Hannah watched Loren's movements with jealous fear; and when she found he did not go to Esther's side, she only suspected more strongly that their future was all arranged, their understanding so complete, that they had nothing to do but to wait. Sometimes she wished to die, and break all their hearts at once with the news that they were the cause of her death; then a fear that, after all, it might be more relief than care, made her resolve if possible to live forever. Sometimes she softened, and would have been ready to promise Esther, her brother, her child, and all her hoarded property, if she would take herself beyond her reach while she lived. Again, she would put on her black-quilted hood and shawl and start to tell



Esther what she thought of her stealing back under an assumed name after a man who belonged to other people, and to tell her that if she made one move to claim her child, she would withhold every dollar from the girl; but, though she went muttering half-way up the Forest path, she usually talked it out to herself, and came back tired out, without having fulfilled the purpose for which she went.

The winter brought a change, and she grew more like herself, gentler and kindlier, for she had her own once more, as before Mr. Lindsay rented the Forest Farm. The boys were taken back to the city first, and Ralph went with them to attend to Donald's duties, and to receive his father on his return. Donald and Mrs. Darrell followed as soon as he was able, and there was left for Lina only the sad pleasure of going over to see Abigail, who had moved her aged mother up to keep her company, and was left in charge of the house. One hope buoyed her up through all the chill of winter. They liked the mountains, and the old house suited them, so they secured its rental by the year, and next summer they were coming again.

What a winter it was to the snow-bound girl! In imagination she followed Ralph in his medical studies, Mrs. Darrell in her home cares, or Donald in his wonderful and fascinating evenings with his



poor boys. Her mind made the most of the leisure and of Loren's books, for she wanted to be ready for the task Uncle Loren had promised she should undertake in the spring. He watched her as tenderly as ever; but even he was more subdued than of old, and Lina saw how fast his hair was becoming gray. She tried to be a blessing, but the joyful conviction that she was one rarely gladdened her heart. Still she was young, and the spring-time would surely come.

And when it came, and in April began the first term of her little school, she felt new life had come to her as well as to the trees and flowers.

Not more than twenty pupils in all, little girls and boys, too small to work in the fields, children of the hill-side farmers, for whom the larger schools in the village were too distant. They came in the morning fresh and rosy from their walk, barefooted boys, bashful girls, books under their arms, and tin pails of luncheon in their hands.

This was her material, and to her task of molding it the young girl set herself with all her heart and soul. For the first time she had use for her best powers; for the first time heart and brain worked in unison. She loved them as Don loved his boys, and did not feel her work was done till she had helped them to be and to do their best.



Not content with books and school, she found them in their homes. The willing but incompetent child of an invalid mother was taught how to shake up pillows, to make a bed, to sweep without raising a shocking dust, to prepare dainty dishes for the sick. The motherless girl, whose culinary knowledge was confined to boiling potatoes and steeping tea, was brought over to the house; and Aunt Hannah, who really delighted in the school because Lina was happy in it, was persuaded to teach her to cook, and all the girls met at intervals together to learn to make garments for themselves, or for those more needy still. So time ran on, till May was nearly over, when, one night, having lingered to help a backward boy over his lesson, she left the little white school-house, and made her way home across the fields.

The sunset had been beautiful; the hills were purple with the after-glow. God seemed wondrously near, and she found herself asking, as the sense of his great loving-kindness sank within her soul, that he would let her heart share his love for the suffering and the poor, and let her help him in her little way to make the weary rest and the sad ones glad. She greatly loved this hour, and her best thoughts often came to her out of doors; therefore she prized the solitary walk to and fro.



Leaving the field for the road, she suddenly came upon Uncle Loren, waiting by the way-side.

"I saw you coming, girly, and waited for you," he said; "I want your help."

"In what, dear uncle? I only wish I was a great boy; then I would help you, indeed I would," and she slipped her arm in his and patted his great kind hand.

"O, it is not on the farm, child. It's only to help me to help some one else. You know how Aunt Hannah hates the sight of a beggar or a tramp, and I have come across three—two men and a woman with a hurdy-gurdy. They are always coming up this way as summer appears, and they go from place to place, and live very comfortably on the contributions from the strangers at the hotels. The men are all right; but the woman looked so miserably ill, that I could not refuse to let them sleep in the barn. It is going to be a cold night, and the barn is well enough for the men; but—but"—he stammered—"I don't think I could sleep, if I thought of a woman out there in the hay."

"What do you want me to do, uncle? Aunt Hannah would never let her stay in the house."

"She is clean," said Loren, thoughtfully; "could she not sleep in the chamber over the shed?"

"I don't know; perhaps Aunt Hannah would let her."



“Well, if she will, let us put her there; if not, and Aunt Hannah is disturbed about them, you go out to the barn with me and see the woman. A woman always knows what ought to be done for another, and I will take out any food you can spare for her.”

Lina gave his arm a little happy squeeze.

“That’s just like you, uncle, always trying to see how you can help one without hurting another. I will do all that I can in this case,” and she did not add her after-thought, that this was, may be, the beginning of an answer to her prayer.

Aunt Hannah’s consent was given, not without much preliminary grumbling, to the woman’s occupancy of the shed chamber. She locked the door communicating with the house, and when the woman was once inside the room, as quietly locked her in. If in the night she chose to let the men in, and rob the house—as she had no doubt they intended to do—she preferred to go to bed feeling she held the keys herself.

Lina took food out to them in the evening, as they sat in the barn, her Uncle Loren carrying the basket and the lantern. She did not wonder that her aunt’s suspicions were aroused, when she saw two rough, swarthy fellows, one young and one middle-aged and quite gray, and a woman, who seemed much



older than either, so haggard and worn and sallow was she, with a hacking cough, and bright red spots under her eyes that glistened in the lamp-light like blazing coals.

She seemed very stiff and lame, and accepted gratefully the warm drink, and offer of a bed, to which Lina showed the way in the garret. As the light of the lantern fell on the girl's face, a sudden exclamation: "*Dio mio!*" broke from her lips; and, turning, she saw the woman with clasped hands and face white with agitation, regarding her with a fixed and burning stare. "*Stellina, Stellina, figlia mia,*" she muttered; and Lina struggled for a moment, with terror and surprise, and said at last, "Yes, I know—you are Felicia, my mamma!"

Broken sobs of joy seemed to overwhelm the old creature. She did not attempt to embrace her; but seized her hands and covered them with kisses and tears. Dumb with conflicting emotions, she grew quiet for a moment, when she heard Hannah's step, and the snap of the lock on the door connecting with the corridor that led to her own room.

"Hush," said Lina, withdrawing her hands, "stay here. I must go now, but I will come back by and by and talk to you."

And she ran hastily down the stairs. She would have gone out in the porch; but a strange old terror



lest "Matteo," whom she now knew to be the elder of the men, should appear before her, sent her to her own room.

As she entered the kitchen Loren was there; he had just come in.

"Well, girly," he said, "it takes all sorts of people to make a world, does it not?" but noticing how pale she was, he added, "Why, what's the matter, child?" bending down and looking into her face.

She trembled like a leaf.

"Why, child, what frightens you so? these Italians?"

And she whispered, "Yes."

"Well, then, I'm sorry I sheltered them," he exclaimed; and then, as if a sudden thought struck him, he said, kissing her gently, and holding her for a moment against his heart, "Don't you fear, little girl; I understand. You have seen such people long ago in the city, and these make you remember. Don't you fear, childie, for my arms are around you."

She clung to him, and perhaps would have sobbed out all her trouble on his neck, had not Hannah appeared at the door, and jingled her keys in triumph.

Before Hannah could see her face she broke away and ran up stairs to her own room, and threw herself on her knees beside the bed.



“Better start those people off pretty early, Hannah, and I’ll not take in any more of that sort,” said Loren.

“Why, have they stolen something, already?”

“No, but I think you are right about it; they are not the kind who need our help. I’m sorry I took them in.”

“Well, we’re of one mind for once,” said Hannah; and went away, glad that she had already locked the door.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

ALONE, between the bed and the window, where a willow-tree tapped the pane with its slender fingers, far into the windy night, Lina faced this new and most terrible misfortune of her life.

She had prayed for power to save the unfortunate, to rescue the perishing, to rest the weary. She had lain awake at night, planning how she should use the money she would earn, to find and help this mother. She had even dreamed, as she heard Don talk of vile men reclaimed from the power of drink by the power of kindness and love—of Matteo, her father—and longed for the day when she might try. And here they were, cast by the waves of trouble at her feet.

She had often thought of asking Donald to find them for her; but, somehow, after she knew Ralph, her courage failed. If Don knew, Ralph must know, and she saw how unwilling she would be to have him see her parents in these two creatures. Then she was willing to seem what she was not to Ralph; how mean her nature must be, how unworthy of him! Again, how she wronged him, by thinking that he was so ignoble as to allow her parentage to change



his view of herself. Yet, reproach herself as she would, she could not help being glad that he did not know.

And Aunt Hannah, too, would she be willing to keep her near her, when she saw from among what people she came? She could see her now in imagination scrubbing and fumigating the room where her mother slept, and what was she better than her mother? Her heart swelled with pity; she could not decide what she would do. She would go to the poor creature now and comfort her, and judge afterward what might be done. Softly she crept to the door; Hannah's room was below; she passed through the corridor, and locked the door on the other side.

The woman was lying in the bed, with her face to the window. Lina sat down beside her, and took her burning hand. She was prepared for pleadings to be acknowledged, to be cared for, but nothing of the sort was asked. The woman raised herself, and put her arms around her, and talked to her in the sweet Italian tone, offering pet names and caresses like those with which she used to soothe her to sleep, when she came home from a day of cold and hunger spent in the noisy streets.

She said: "You must not let Matteo see you in the morning, *cara*; he will want money from this kind man with whom you live. He is very angry always



that you went away, for he has had to work for himself; but I am very glad, now that I know you are safe and well."

Lina let her talk, and smoothed her face, meantime, with her hand. A strange stillness seemed to have come down upon her.

"What shall I do for you?" she asked, conscious, perhaps, that there was lack of affection to be made up by service. "I must take care of you now that you are sick. You ought not to go about any more. I must work for both."

"I see that you are a good and kind child; but I like to go about among the hills, and Matteo earns enough. If he would let the drink alone, he would be kind and good."

"Does he ever beat you now, mamma?" asked Lina.

"Not often now," she answered, coughing. Lina raised her in the bed, and the two sat and whispered through the night; and Lina promised, if her mother would let her know where she could be found in the city, to send her money, as she had it, to buy comforts and medicine and food and clothing; she promised, also, that she would go to the city as soon as the way opened to do it, and find some work to do, and care for her as best she knew. But for the present she could not leave those who had been so good to her; and if Felicia would not leave Matteo, she



must wait till Lina could come to her. When she went into the room she had not made up her mind to promise this; but sitting there by the side of this victim of poverty and distress, partly because her love did not acknowledge her, her conscience took upon herself the task.

Surely she owed too much to Uncle Loren and Aunt Hannah to leave them; but when the time came that Felicia would leave Matteo, she would tell Loren all about it, and he would let her go. It was evident that she had found her work, to care for Hannah and Felicia, in sickness and old age—the two women who, in her helplessness, had cared for her.

Soothed by the gentle acceptance of the girl, who would, as she feared, refuse to know her, and overcome by weakness, Felicia fell asleep. Then softly the girl stole to her room, and, kneeling again by the open window, kept her first vigil through the night, praying for strength to do what she had promised. She was frightened to find how her feelings of outraged helplessness, of anger and contempt, came back, when she thought of the man whose daughter she believed herself to be. Not for a moment did she include him in the plan; and it was only after a weary struggle that she included him in the prayer.

Worn out with this trial, she fell asleep, with her head against the pane. When she awoke, she was



doubtful where she was; but, away down the lane, she could hear a jargon of angry voices. She listened—it was surely the Italians. She could see the arms and shoulders of the men shrugging and gesticulating as they talked. Behind them came Felicia, who seemed to be entreating and remonstrating, or protesting, as they passed out of sight at a turn in the road. Hannah had fulfilled Loren's suggestion, and had "given them an early start."

Being Saturday, there was no school that day, and Aunt Hannah was unusually pleasant and kind; and so utterly had the Italians passed out of sight, that but for the memory of it, she could have called it all a dream. She helped Hannah to clean the shed chamber, with many strange sad thoughts clouding her brain; and, entering the room alone, she noticed a drawer in an old-fashioned chest of drawers that was slightly open. From it projected the edge of a slip of paper. Instantly she divined its object. It had been placed there to attract her attention. In Italian, in a trembling hand, was scratched upon it, "*Addio, carissima, Addio, Numero Quarante-uno, Strada Mulberry, York Nuova.*" She closed the drawer, and put the paper carefully away in her desk. She knew what it meant, and God would enable her to keep her word.

On Sunday, she was among her girls in the Sab-



bath-school and at church, and it seemed to her she never knew before how to speak to them of love and self-sacrifice, of love that longs to be of use.

On Monday morning, at the school, while her children were taking recreation in the yard, the sound of a hurdy-gurdy broke upon her ear. It was no unusual sound in the summer weather; but somehow it smote her heart to-day with a sudden tremor and chill. She sent a little boy to ring the bell, for, if it should be Matteo, she would not let him see her face; and when the children came in and took their seats, the music ceased, and her heart gave a great throb of relief. But it was too soon, for close behind the last barefooted urchin came a stalwart man, gray-haired, unshaven, with a bloated face and small glittering eyes. He stood in the door, face to face with the girl, extending his hat as if for money, but fixing upon her a most scrutinizing gaze.

Without a word, she opened her small purse, and, holding it so that he could see she gave him all, she emptied it into his hat. If she gave all, perhaps he would not return. "*Grazia Signorina*;" and as he left the door, he said "*Addio*," until we meet again."

She hardly knew how she got through the day. She went straight to Uncle Loren, and said with the tears starting from her eyes:



“Uncle Loren, you will think I am a baby; but those Italians came with the hurdy-gurdy to the school to-day, and I am afraid.”

“Never mind, my child,” said he, stroking her hair; “they will not come again. I have had a visit from them. The old man came back from the school, and asked to stay here to-night, and I forbade it.”

“Do not anger him, uncle; they are dreadful men. They would try to revenge themselves. They are wicked enough to burn the house over our heads.”

“Don’t you fear, darling. I have sent them away, once for all. He was very impatient; he meant to get money out of me; but I told him if he did not get out of the county in twenty-four hours, that I would have him locked up as a vagrant. You would not be sorry to see him shut up, Lina?”

He asked the last question abruptly, watching her face the while, for he thought that if what the man had told him was true—if, indeed, she was his daughter, she would wish him to be spared.

She read his face, and a sudden sense of shame that she had concealed from him what she knew he had every right to know, came over her, and she said, bowing her head and crimsoning with shame:

“Dear uncle, I don’t know what to say. I know he is a bad man; I never can help being very angry



with him, since—since I was a child ; I—I lived—  
with him, and he was cruel and beat me, and yet I  
am afraid he is my father.”

Her voice sank almost to a whisper, and her white  
lips and quivering eyelids only showed what the con-  
fession cost.

“I don’t believe it,” answered Mr. Wilde, quickly ;  
“and you need not. I think he claimed you for  
money only. Did you call him papa ?”

“No, Mamma Felicia told me to call him, ‘Papa  
Matteo ;’ the other children did not call their par-  
ents so. I did as I was told.”

“Well, you shall not be troubled by him again, I  
promise you. I don’t choose to believe his story. I  
doubt if the woman is your mother ; but, of course,  
I cannot know. I—”

“But she was kind, and she loved me.”

“And you loved her ?”

She answered, hastily,

“Not as I ought to do, Uncle Loren ; I want to  
take care of her ; I want to help her ; I think he is  
cruel to her.”

“And so you shall help her, my child ; for what-  
ever you may have been, you are my child by law ;  
for I have regular papers of adoption, and have all a  
father’s right to protect you.”

He forgot in his eagerness how he had felt, that



he would be glad to see her proven *not* to be Mrs. Darrell's child. Now he would have been more glad to have it clearly proven that she was any thing rather than to have her haunted by her present fears.

He comforted her; and, relying implicitly upon his word, she lost the fear of further contact with Matteo, kept her resolution to aid Felicia, and tried to forget the rest.

On the evening of the day when this talk with Loren occurred, Forest Farm again received its occupants. Early the following afternoon Ralph and Don found their way to Mr. Wilde's. Lina was in school, and Loren in the field. Hannah received them a little stiffly, but more cordially than they had any reason to expect. Six months had passed; and as nothing threatening had occurred, the edge of her hostility was somewhat blunted.

Ralph was in fine condition—"never so well," he said. He sat in the porch, and told Hannah that Mrs. Darrell was to remain in town awhile, but that his father was coming instead, with his sister, whom he hoped to persuade Miss Wilde to take among her pupils.

Strange how genial Hannah became under the news that Mrs. Darrell was not to come! She even said, "it would be nice for Lina to have a private



pupil," a concession which ordinarily she would not have made.

Donald said that his boys were coming—quite an army of them, and that he was going to look for a camp-ground for them in the woods, as he must begin at once to prepare their quarters; but Ralph declined to take so long a tramp, and said he would sit with Aunt Hannah until Don came back again. If it occurred to him that school would be out, and that some one might join Hannah ere Donald returned, he did not confide his hope to the old lady, and Don went striding off up the hill toward the woods. He had in mind a couple of sugar-houses standing in the forest, the walls of which he thought he could use, with Loren's permission, as supports for the cabins or booths which he meant the boys to build. An hour's climbing brought him in sight of one of these—a black, dreary-looking hut, in a grove of somber pines. As he approached he noticed empty bottles and scraps of paper and food, signs of human life about the house. Suddenly a scream rang out on the air, followed by a volley of drunken abuse, in the Italian tongue, such as made him feel suddenly transferred to the Five Points region in the city of New York. He heard a blow, a fall, a moan, and before there was time for more his foot had broken in the door and he stood in the middle of the hut.



A woman crouched in the corner; the blow was for her, but the fall was that of the man who dealt it, who now lay, too intoxicated to rise, upon the cabin floor.

His first impulse was not altogether humanitarian and pacific. He was very strongly disposed to handle the man roughly enough to finish the work the liquor had begun, and to render him powerless for further harm; but he saw that the spasm of drunken raving was fast being followed by the succeeding stage of stupor, so left him alone, and turned his attention to the woman. She covered her head with her shawl, and, amid sobs and broken cries, begged him not to take her husband away, and not to shut him up.

"I will make him go; I have tried to make him go, and he is not bad when he is sober."

Donald soothed her, and permitted her to come outside with him, promising her that he would help her, and that no harm should come to them. Little by little she was reassured, and, amid much coughing and distress, was persuaded to tell her fears.

"I do not like to tell; I do not dare to tell. He would kill me if he knew; but I am old, I am sick, and I do not know what to do. I fear that he will do something that will bring harm."

Her eyes and cheeks glowed with a feverish light,



and Don feared she was too bewildered with trouble to know really what she said; but by dint of questioning, he drew from her that her husband was angry with the farmer at the foot of the hill; that he said the farmer's adopted daughter belonged to him; and that he asked the farmer for money in return for her labor during all these years; that he gave him some money, but bade him leave the town, and threatened to have him arrested if he did not go. She said that Matteo's anger was aroused, and he would not go, but had concealed himself here in the hut, watching for a chance to be revenged. She could not make him abandon the idea.

"What does he mean to do?" he asked.

"Sometimes he threatens the girl," she said; "sometimes to fire the buildings; and I have tried to go to the farm to warn her; but he caught me in the woods and beat me, so that I could only crawl back here," and again she covered her head and wept. "I do not care for myself; I would not tell for myself; but I cannot have him harm the child. Think, signore, I held her in these arms, and slept with her in my breast," and she spread out her emaciated arms and bronzed, wasted hands, and then folded them about her as if she hugged within them still the form of a little child.

"Then you loved her?"



"*Dio Mio*, I have had only her to love!" she answered, fiercely.

"Then be comforted, my good woman," he said; "I will protect her. Persuade him to go away, if you can; tell him, when he is sober, that I saw him, and that I leave you this money with which to go away; and that I will report him to Mr. Wilde if he does not go. Tell him that I am from New York, and know how to find him there, too; and he will go. But I will watch the girl; you need not fear, he shall not hurt her."

Then he arose, and, going into the now shadowy hut, struck a match, and then another, and by their light he scanned the face heavy in its drunken sleep.

She watched him anxiously.

"He is not bad when he is sober," she said again. "Do you really know him?"

"Yes, I thought I did; now I am sure. I have seen him often in New York, years ago, with the organ and the child. If he does not go away, tell him I will see that he never goes back;" and with a few more kindly words he left her.

When a hundred rods away he went back. Stopping on the way, he gathered armfuls of boughs of fragrant fir, and with them came back to the cabin. Still the woman sat there, crouching outside the door. Close against the cabin wall he threw his



load; out again and back with another. Then, finding a hollow between the rocks, he built a little fire, and, gently drawing her near it, he laid her on the bed he had made, so that the warmth should reach her feet and penetrate her frame. Then quickly removing his light overcoat, he wrapped it about her shoulders, and was gone.



## CHAPTER XIX.

DON feared his coat would be missed, and his lateness noticed, when he returned to the house; but no, to Ralph the time had been all too short. He had been with Lina in the porch. What Donald felt as he saw them there could not be put into words.

The childish life that had so drawn out his sympathy came before him, and as he saw Lina to-night, with the glow of pleasure lighting her cheeks and eyes, and thought of the mother lying up there under the stars among the pines, with the fire of misery slowly burning out her life, his heart was full of thankfulness for the one, of pity for the other. And then came back to his heart a sort of joy, that He who had protected her in childhood could protect her now.

“What time is school out, Lina?” he said, as they parted. “I’ll come round and walk home with you to-morrow. I’ve not had half a chance to-night, and I have the plans to submit to you for my boys.”

But Ralph was full of spirits. Donald felt he knew the secret of his joy, and was not surprised when he said,



"Don, old fellow, do you know I believe I love that girl?"

"I know it," said Don, gently.

"The truth is, she makes a new man of me; she is so in earnest and so real. She takes that horrible life at the farm like a little queen."

"They are very fond of her, Ralph. It is not so bad a life, and I'm not sure but it is the discipline that makes her so sweet and helpful to others."

"Yes, I understand," said Ralph, eagerly; "but I long for the day when I shall dare to ask her to help me."

"Why don't you ask her, then?"

"Because I am such a good-for-nothing, Don; I have done nothing yet. Some man ought to win her who is doing a brave work in the world, like yourself, for example."

"But you will do a brave work. You are to be a physician. She is born to soothe and comfort. Since you began to go about with me among the poor and to minister to the sick you have been doing the work she likes best. I think she loves you, my boy, and see but one reason why you should not win her."

"What's that?" said Ralph, with some excitement; "what can there be, if you think I can become worthy of her?"



“That she should fancy she could not be worthy of you. She is thoughtful and sensitive. She is an adopted child. Her parents were probably very poor, possibly ignorant and degraded. I know, as you cannot, how the young people feel who have such a heritage. I doubt if she would feel that she had any right to take to any man an origin of which he would be ashamed.”

“Who cares for her origin, Don? I thought you knew me better. I tell you she’s fit for any home any man could offer.”

“Well, Ralph, here we are, and God bless you! I wish you all success, but I think it well for you to be warned; if she will not marry you, the reason will be the one I gave.”

“Nonsense, Don, you are morbid; what does it matter who her mother and father were?”

Don thought of the couple lying under the pines, and shivered; but he said no more. How, indeed, could one reared like Ralph know what it mattered?

The next afternoon Don went to the hut in the forest, and found the woman much better; but she eagerly took the food he brought; and she said that while they were at the hut her husband’s companion had been out with the organ, and that her husband had now gone to find him, and that they were to go away without fail at night.



Relieved by the prospect of their departure, he left her, promising to find her, and to keep her from suffering in New York.

Ten minutes after the hour for school to close he was sauntering along the road by the little white school-house, and noticed that the blinds were all drawn; and, walking to the door, found it locked. Strange, he thought, that she, with all the children, should have left so early. I thought some naughty boys always had to be kept behind. Rather chiding his tardiness, he yet felt no anxiety, for the sun was shining, and the road home lay between fields where there would be little chance of annoyance to the girl; and, besides, the organ-grinder had given up his plan.

Reaching the house, Hannah handed him a note, saying that the little three-year-old sister of Rebecca White, the motherless pupil, who was trying to care for her little brother and sister, was suddenly taken dangerously ill; that Lina would close school an hour earlier, and go to her, instead of coming directly to her own home. If the child could be left she would come home at night; if not, she would remain till morning. Aunt Hannah was not to be troubled. This set Donald's mind at ease; still, saying nothing to Hannah, he went around the river, near the White Farm, on his way home, only to find Rebecca



in great distress. The child seemed to be dying; she had looked to Lina for help in this, as she had in all trials since the mother died, and Lina had not come.

The little brother had come home early, saying the teacher sent him on to tell his sister she would be there in half an hour. Two hours were passed, the evening was near, and she had not come.

Don waited for no words. Thoroughly aroused and frightened, he strode down the road between the house and the school-house, a clear road, except at one point, where a belt of forest crossed it for a few hundred yards. Here he looked in the sandy tract, and the brushwood by the way, for signs of an attack and a struggle; but there was nothing to indicate that one had occurred; but as he hurried on, striving to penetrate the hedge of tangled undergrowth on either side, his ear caught a crackling sound, as of twigs under a footstep, and at the same moment he saw the crouching form of a man rise from a clump of bushes near the road, and plunge into the forest with reckless haste. To plunge after, to overtake him, to seize him by the arm, then by the throat; to find himself bending over Matteo, like St. Michael, strong in all the power of youth and right, over the prostrate form of the dragon, was but the work of a moment. Struggle was useless; the



more the ruffian writhed and cursed, the stronger the grip at his throat.

"Where is the girl? What have you done with the girl?" said Don, between his teeth; "you wretch! you old brute! I have had to save her from you before. Speak quick, before I kill you; I've a great mind to kill you, any way!" and he gave the necktie another twist.

Utterly cowed and trembling, weakened by drink and fear, he told, without delay,

"She is not hurt; she is in the school-house; Jack is watching outside."

"Jack, the villain!—is it Jack?"

"Yes, but he will not hurt her. I have the key."

"Get it quick, if you want to live!" said Don, giving his tie another turn. Squirming and twisting, the man produced the key.

"We were not going to hurt her; only to take her, after dark, to her mother. She would have kept her safe till the man who stole her from me would pay."

"You brigand! no man ever stole her, unless you did."

"She is my child!"

"You lie; and if you dare to say it again, I'll not leave a whole bone for you to crawl away with."

Poor Don's nature had the better of grace for



once; and if he restrained his hands, he must let his tongue have liberty.

He never loosened his hold on the throat, but with one hand unfastened a strap of leather which the man wore about the waist, drew a knife from the pocket, and, cutting it in two pieces, used one for a handcuff for the hands, which the man placed meekly together on promise that the hold on his throat should be released. The other piece bound his feet securely together; and then, without a word, away Don tore, with all his old newsboy instincts thoroughly aroused, and absolutely "spoiling for a fight."

As he bounded on to the steps, before he could fit the key in the door, a dark figure sprang from behind the wood-pile under the window, and ran like a deer for the woods.

The first impulse was to follow, and prevent the ruffian's escape; but a low cry from within decided him, and he hastily opened the door. There, in the dark, bound to her seat at one of the desks, her hands fastened behind her, and a little shawl crowded into her mouth and bound around the head, to stifle any cries she might attempt to make, sat Lina, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

Donald sprang to release her, but his knife had been left in the woods. The cords resisted his strength; but with lighted matches he burned one



by one the thongs that bound her, talking gently all the while; and, overcome by the excitement, she lowered her head upon the desk, and wept like a child.

When she recovered herself he would have taken her home; but she begged him to take her instead to her pupil.

“Rebecca will be so anxious about me, and she has trouble enough without that. Then Aunt Hannah will be frightened, and Uncle Loren would arouse the town, and have the men punished.”

“They ought to be punished,” said Don; “and if Uncle Loren doesn’t do it, I will.”

And then, in terror of a public exposure and disgrace, Lina begged that he would keep the secret of this attempt, and told him what he already knew, that they thought they had a right to her services as their child. Don told her of his early acquaintance with them and with herself; and then, before they reached the White Farm, she acknowledged that she had known him from the first.

Lina told him of her pity and love for Felicia, and Don promised to keep her in sight in New York; to see that she did not suffer, and, if possible, to save her from a life with the poor wretch to whom she seemed so faithfully to cling.

Conscious of the great sympathy which their childish experience of sorrow gave them both, and so glad



that at last there was some one who knew it all, and grateful beyond measure for deliverance, the two brave young souls talked of the life of suffering and misery so well known to them, and of their desire to do as much as possible to make the sad condition of the very poor less wretched and degraded.

But the gentlest talk with Lina did not prevent Don's hastening back to the clump of bushes, where he had left Matteo bound. It was as he had feared. His companion had released him, and they were gone. They had evidently watched the school-house all day; and, when they saw the last children go, had entered and surprised Lina in the act of departure, and had bound and left her to wait for the darkness of the night.

Don came early next day; not only to see if he could do any thing for the child, but to go with Lina to the school. The little one had rallied, and some hope had sprung up for her life; but Lina looked worn and white. The walk revived her somewhat; and at night, when he came again to go with her to her home, he had the satisfaction of telling her that the cabin in the woods was deserted, and that the organ-grinders left on the train for Clermont, having purchased three tickets for New York. But of his own share in their departure he made no comment, neither then nor afterward.



## CHAPTER XX.

AGAIN the summer green changed to crimson and gold, and the school was over. Completed, too, were the private lessons to Ralph's sister, Adah, whose delight in Lina's talks of birds and insects, and rocks and ferns and flowers, had been a joy to her young teacher's heart. The young girl knew some French and German and literature and history; but the world of nature was new to her, and she found in it a wondrous charm.

The boys, brought for a holiday from the city, had been so numerous this year, that they overflowed the camp. Mrs. Darrell and Lina, who were in constant correspondence, felt it a pity that boys only should have the healthful life and the country change. Then Mrs. Darrell went to Mr. Brace, and told him that she would help to select homes for delicate girls also. They were to be confided to Lina's care upon arrival. He called for contributions from the rich to enable him to send them, and Lina went about and persuaded almost every farmer's family in the township to make a home for one or two.

The Forest Farm-house was filled in every corner,



and Abigail shared the joy of seeing the wan cheeks grow rosy and bright with the change.

Lina had worked very hard with and for the girls in a multitude of ways, though she did not burden Aunt Hannah by bringing them into the house. But she kept up the sewing-classes; she took with Mrs. Darrell an oversight of all their life; she gathered them for work, for play, to hear a story, to hunt for mosses, insects, or flowers.

And when they were all gone, and winter winds were scattering the russet leaves, and the Forest Farm-house was shut, and she was alone with Aunt Hannah, she was dreary enough.

Her heart had been much in her work, yet it tried to fill itself with plans for future labor, hoping thus to stifle its hunger and soothe its hurt. For the hunger was for love, which she had forbidden it to take; and the hurt was given by her own hand, when she tried to shut love out.

Ralph had told her of his affection for her, and of his desire that she should share his life. Lina had had a struggle long and severe. Out of it she came with the mistaken, but sincere, conviction that her life belonged to Loren and Hannah first, and to Felicia after, and then, perhaps, even to the cruel man who claimed her for his child.

Surely her relation to others must determine her



duties, and gratitude and natural affection bound her first to those who had cared for her youth. Now she must lighten their old age. When that was done—but why think of that? By that time she would be old. She had no right to burden Ralph's life with waiting for her, or if she did not wait, to bring him such relations as she knew her father and mother to be. Then, again, she had been saved from misery and shame—ought not her life to be given to saving others? She longed to go to the city, to work as Donald did, as Don said she could do if she were there. And, so, in this longing, she tried to lose the other longing, for a rest in the heart of the man she loved.

“Ralph would get over it; Ralph would find some one else,” she said to herself; and then she hated herself for feeling as if it would kill her if he did.

And into these melancholy days came a letter from Mr. Lindsay, saying that Adah wanted her dear teacher and friend to come to her, and to continue to instruct her, and that they were convinced that they could find no one who could do for the daughter's mind and heart so well as Lina, if only she could come, and for the winter make one of their household. Then, in the summer, Adah could go to Forest Farm and continue her lessons, thus avoiding the interruption to her studies which a change of



home must otherwise involve. In the branches of knowledge which Lina felt herself unqualified to teach the two girls could have masters together, and Adah would study all the better for Lina's companionship and interest in the same pursuit.

How her heart bounded as her uncle gave her the letter to read! How she hungered and longed to go! Loren's heart sank at the thought of home without her, but he said, "they had no right to narrow and limit her life," and he thought she ought to go. Aunt Hannah had not yet seen the letter, and Lina begged that she might not, till she had considered its contents; for why trouble her, if all ended in her staying at home? She took a night to think it out, and then decided that it was not right, either for Ralph or for herself, to be where life would be so hard for him. For herself she could bear it; she would find it joy, and only joy, to be under the same roof; but to daily remind him of his disappointment would be, so the sensitive girl thought, any thing but kind. And so she told her uncle she had decided not to go.

Later came a letter from Ralph himself, urging her consent to the plan, for his sister's sake. He was going abroad to prosecute his medical studies; Mrs. Darrell seemed feeble; he knew how Lina loved her, and Adah needed her sorely; would she



not come, so that he might see her once more before he left?

Then, indeed, it was hard not to go. Then she decided to tell Aunt Hannah, and to go, if she gave consent.

But the poor old woman, who had been comforted by Mrs. Darrell's absence, and had settled back into some sense of security and peace, seemed once more possessed by the demon of jealousy, and indignant sense of injury. "Another plan and plot to win the child away from her—nothing more!" She would hear no reasoning, could see no advantage. "If the girl chose to go, 'twas no more than one might expect; but she need not trouble herself to come back. If ever they needed her, they needed her now. She had no 'call' to work. They had adopted her; she might expect to inherit all they had. No doubt she would give it all away, and go, poor and hungry herself, to feed and clothe beggars; but certainly she ought not to prefer working for city folks, to serving those who had brought her up."

Alas! poor Lina, she gave it up; Aunt Hannah had her way. But there came one day a letter from Donald, in which he said that the Italian, Felicia, whom he had at once found on his return, and for whom, through him, Lina had provided, was free at last from Matteo. Her freedom had come by a hard



process; for, in a drunken moment, he had beaten her almost to death, and, in consequence, had been sent for a year to Blackwell's Island. Now she was very ill, and her recovery doubtful, and she pleaded piteously for Lina. "Could she come?"

Then Lina went, with Loren as an escort. Aunt Hannah was so angry that she would neither speak to her or look at her, when she went to say good-bye. Loren felt troubled about her mood of silent rage, and hurried back as soon as he had seen Lina safe in Donald's care. Donald took her at once to the Lindsays, who, overjoyed to see her, seemed almost to claim her as their own.

Ralph was already gone. Felicia, so Don said, had been removed to a hospital, where the utmost that would be allowed to Lina would be to visit her an hour each day. Don had arranged all this, knowing that otherwise the girl would take the entire nursing upon herself.

Not knowing how long she might be kept, she began the lessons with Adah at once; and, if charming occupation and opportunities to do, to see, and to learn could have lightened her burden, she would have had a happy heart. Into her life love and tenderness flowed from all about her. The enthusiastic little Adah loved her like an elder sister. Donald was full of thoughtful care. He took her



every-where to see and to share his work among the poor. Not a house of refuge for orphans or destitute children, not an organization for helping people to help themselves, for teaching how to work, for furnishing work to the needy, or support to the feeble, but he took her to study its work and plan.

Mrs. Darrell was unfailing in tenderness and love to her, and the rest the tired heart found, in being again freely in her presence, no one could measure. She saw her with Donald, interested in all his schemes and plans; with Adah, gentle and faithful; with little children every-where, a blessing and comfort, and felt that she was the ideal mother, and wondered what her own life would have been had God given her to such a one. Meantime, her poor mamma, Felicia, was too ill to see her. Fever had set in, and she knew no one. The daily visit was paid, and anxiety held Lina in its grasp, so that the edge of all her pleasure was blunted by it. Uncle Loren's letters were a comfort to her; he never told her that when he reached home the house had undergone a transformation, and moved backward a dozen years. Every trace of the child of his heart was removed. Every picture Lina had drawn, every decoration of the rooms by which she had gradually changed their prim and hard look for the aspect of a home, was torn down and put out of sight. Hard and grim the



very chairs looked, set in a row against the wall. The pretty table-cover of cloth, embroidered with bright colors, which the child worked with her own fingers, was replaced by a dark oil-cloth; the dainty curtains, with a cornice of autumn leaves and pendent ferns, were taken down, and the door of Lina's room was locked.

When he begun to tell of the journey, she shut her lips with a snap, then opened them to say:

"Lorenzo Wilde, I have done with women-folks in this house—forever. No good ever came of more than one. One's enough—she gone, and the door's shut."

"To be opened again whenever she chooses to come home, Hannah," he answered, firmly; but she made no reply, and from that time, when her letters came, she left them on the table unopened, for him to read; and when he spoke of her she never seemed to hear.

But the shadow of this trouble crept, unconsciously to himself, out of his letters, and made Lina know he was unhappy, though he did his best to keep it from her sight.

Gradually life took, through all these influences, new shape in her mind. Her duty to Felicia stood first; to nurse and comfort her when she rallied, to be with her at the last if she died. Then to go back



and give to the home its daughter, and to be to Loren and Hannah the stay of their declining years. In her thought of this, there was pleasure mingled with pain, for she loved Loren, she loved the hills, she loved her work in the homes and among the young of the region round about. She could be most useful, if she never knew any life but this, and she did not allow her imagination to stray much beyond it; but her heart perpetually strayed toward a time when her field of labor should change, and she should become a daily worker under the direction of the noble men and women who were to live for the uplifting of the lowly, the healing of the suffering, the comfort of the distressed. So, in the midst of her present studies and labors and cares, she had the joy of aspiration for the coming years. As time glided on, Felicia slowly crept back to life, and Lina's ministry seemed to bring to her great comfort and content. When able to be removed from the hospital to a sunny room, with Donald's help, Lina brightened the place with every comfort, and conscientiously nursed her, spending with her the hours the Lindsays thought she spent in recreation. To add to her anxiety, she learned in this season that before her illness the poor creature had sought forgetfulness of her woes in the use of opium, a practice from which no tenderness or firmness could save her, now that the



hospital restraint was removed. She resolved continually, and promised continually, but had no power to resist; so that to leave money with her was out of the question, and therefore upon Lina came the care of providing for her wants from day to day.



## CHAPTER XXI.

BUT the care of Felicia dropped upon Donald, when, one day, a letter came from Loren. Hannah had had a fall in descending the stairs, and had so injured herself as to be unable to move from her chair. She would not hear of Lina's being sent for; but Loren thought, if Lina could come, it might be best. By the return mail the answer came, and Loren had hardly time to drive to Littleton to meet her, before she was there. How gladly would he, with his own hands, unaccustomed to touch of delicate things, have rehung every picture, have replaced every bit of moss and fern upon the wall, rather than have her know that Hannah had torn them down; but since she must know it, he thought it best to tell her.

"You will find it hard, my child, and I did not send for you because we need you to do the work. Betsey Jones is there now, but cannot stay; you can bring any of your girls that you please, to do that which will leave you strength and time for Aunt Hannah. But now, if ever, she must be won from her bitter mood. We must love her old heart out of



its deadness and hardness now in the Lord's own way, or she will never change. She will be angry at first that you came; for she is resolved never to let her heart warm toward any one again; but, secretly, she will be glad, first, because she knows you understand her household ways; and later, because she loves, really loves you, and has missed you sorely every day."

"Perhaps I ought never to have left her, uncle," said Lina, ruefully, thinking how little she had been able to do for Felicia.

"No, no, you were right," said Loren, who was glad she had been spared this period at home; "and now we will do the best we can, and I shall be so happy to have you back," he said, throwing his arm around her, as he rode on through the woods. She dropped her head upon his shoulder, feeling rested, she hardly knew why, resolving to drive the worn, sad look from his eyes, if it was in the power of love to make him glad.

It is needless to dwell upon the new home life that begun under such strange conditions. Hannah welcomed her with an angry stare; and, turning to Loren, said,

"Well, Lorenzo, that's just like a man! Here I am, tied hand and foot, and you take this time to bring home company, a fine lady from the town.



Well, put her in the spare chamber; but she'll be obliged to wait upon herself if she stays."

"Of course I'll do that, auntie, for you know I couldn't be company where I've always been at home;" but she had hard work to restrain her tears till she was beyond Hannah's sight. And this was only the beginning of months of care.

Hannah was seriously injured; her face looked pinched with pain. She could not die, though she said she wished she might; but she might never walk again. The most that she could do was to crawl feebly from bed to chair. But, poor soul, she had her trials. Not to be able to go to the kitchen and scold, while others worked; to have Lina's hands cook and serve her food—was almost more than she could bear. Betsey, the woman whom she had been forced, much against her will, to receive into her kitchen, confided to Lina that sometimes she had feared Hannah would die; that she knew she never could have been so patient if she hadn't been "ripenin' for heaven."

However that may have been, the ripening process was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Lina upon the scene. But, secretly, she grew glad, as Loren had predicted, and secretly she softened, but only to grow more grim and harder than ever, if any one seemed to detect the softening. Jealousy was



ever active; and temper, aggravated by pain, often had full sway.

To be patient and gentle and pitiful was discipline for both Lina and her uncle; but they helped each other. Each made for the other an atmosphere of home-rest and confidence and peace. Again the old life in the house and among the young went on; again she sang in the choir, visited the sick, encouraged the studious. It was the old life, only more than ever lonely and sad.

And upon this life broke a new wave of trouble for her, inasmuch as it was trouble for her dearest friends. Suddenly, in the midst of the vigor and strength of a noble manhood, Mr. Lindsay sickened and died. Adah begged for her to come; Mrs. Darrell asked it, too; but it was not till he had been lying in Greenwood nearly a month that she could get away. And then she went to spend two days only beside the darkened hearth. Arrived at the railroad station in the city alone, for Loren could not go with her this time, she looked anxiously about for Donald; but he did not appear. A gentleman in black came swiftly through the crowd. "Miss Wilde, Lina, since Donald could not be here, I have come for you myself." And Ralph, grown stouter and older, and changed by his black dress, met her with moistened eyes.



"I arrived only three days ago," he said; "I started at once, when I learned that my father was ill;" he added, talking on to cover her silence, for he saw she was too much agitated to speak. Then, drawing her hand within his arm, he took her to the carriage, and in the darkness she regained her voice, though she did not the possession of her hand.

Strange as it may seem, all the present sorrow, which she came to share, all the distress and constraint and pain she had left behind, were lost in the full glad consciousness of present joy. He had come home; he was near. She could see his face, could hear his voice, and for the moment these made all of life to her.

She went through the brightly lighted streets and the wide avenues like one blind; her soul was wandering in the streets of a new and celestial land, and he was beside her there. He had taken possession of his kingdom without a word. At the door of his home he released her hand, sealing the silence with the one word "mine," to which her lips answered nothing, and her eyes only with a smile.

In that transcendent hour her misgivings, her sense of duty, disappeared into a region of their own, but they returned in the hours of converse that followed in the succeeding days.

She was utterly frank with him, and presented her



scruples one by one. She told with many tears of Matteo and Felicia.

"These are the only parents I know," she said.

"And in the sense that they are yours—yours to care for, to uplift, to comfort—they shall be mine also," he replied.

She told him of Aunt Hannah and Uncle Loren, and of her life that belonged to them, while they needed it.

"Very well, mine shall belong to them also. Till you can share my home I will share yours. You shall never be taken from them while your duty and your love say stay."

"But my work. I have chosen my work. I feel that I, from my experience, know how to help the little children as one with a happier childhood could not know. I have chosen a work in life; and, happy as I am in your love, I should grow restless if I gave up this work for my own selfish joy."

"And in that work, my darling, I have already found my place. You will go among the poor as a comforter and friend, I as a healer and teacher. I have labored hard at my profession, but I have no need to use it for money. With your help I can go on as I have already begun, using my knowledge to heal, to teach sanitary law, to show the ignorant how to avoid disease and consequent suffering. I will be



the apostle of cleanliness, of decent and comfortable homes, of good drainage, of nourishing food and pure air; you the angel of God's spiritual truth, which cleaner and sounder bodies will be better prepared to receive. Your work shall be done, my love; will you deny me the gladness of striving by your side?"

There was but one shadow on this time, besides that of Mr. Lindsay's recent death, and that was the shadow that fell from a long letter that Ralph gave Lina from Don, on the night that she arrived. Already they had told her of a change in Don's prospects and plans. He had been Mr. Lindsay's confidential manager, and before his death it had been arranged that he should be appointed to an important post in the business, involving great profits, but also great responsibilities. Mr. Lindsay had made him joint executor, with Ralph, of his estate, showing him the confidence he would have bestowed on another son. Ralph told her how glad both he and his sister felt, to have their affairs in such faithful hands, and that it was his purpose to become, with Don, a partner in the old firm. "I furnish the capital, Don the labor, and thus I am left free to follow my profession." To consult with the European branch of the house, on some important issues, it had been necessary for one of them to return to London, and Don decided suddenly to go.



“He sailed a week ago, and he left this letter for you,” said Ralph, “thinking you would be here before this time.”

The letter told her of his fears and hopes, of his joy in using his powers in the service of those so dear as the Lindsays were to him, and of his manly hope to win fortune for himself, that he might use it for those who were so unfortunate as to possess neither money nor the power to get it. He wrote to her as a brother to a sister, of Ralph’s noble conduct and support, and of a secret hope that a day might come when he could dare to make a brother’s claim upon his love.

“I think he knows, for his father knew, of my attachment to Adah; but you know that the same reasons that would make you shrink from giving yourself to Ralph, should prevent my asking her to be my wife. I am nameless, too. I have been homeless all my days, but for the home in loving hearts that have given me a refuge. As you would not know what name to resign for Ralph, so I should not know what name to give to Adah, for Donald Lawrence is not my name, but a name the newsboys and bootblacks gave me when I made my appearance as a ragged urchin in their midst. I told them my name was Lawrie Donald, and when I became a favorite, a little Spanish boy began to say Don Lawrie,



which name clung to me until I hardly knew whether to write Donald Lawrence or Lawrie Donald. And I have so wanted a name that I could feel was my own. I have many memories of childish days, memories of which I have often wished to talk to you, but it is only within a few days that I have had a clew to my early life. Now I have one, but its thread leads me to the other side of the sea. And, strange as it may seem, the clew came through Felicia. You know how superstitious she is, and you know, too, that there are days when she would sell her soul for the indulgence in opium that she so craves. I have not dared to leave her money; but I found her one night quaking with cold and terror lest I should come and find that she had pawned the blankets from her bed. I took the pawn-ticket from her, locked her in the room, and went to recover the bedclothes. And I took occasion to forbid the broker to accept anything from her again, as she was not in her right mind. 'I thought not,' he answered, 'for she raved like one crazy here at the sight of an old picture.' I persuaded him to tell me more, and he said the woman came early in the evening, and offered him a Bible, and some old trinket of no value, glass, or perhaps amber. But as he was examining them, she snatched them from his hand, and began to cry and moan, and to talk to this picture, and promised to



keep these things. He got rid of her as soon as he could, and toward night she came back quietly enough, left the blankets, looked around furtively, and went away. I felt, Lina, that the opium was the cause of the excitement; but I, nevertheless, asked to see the picture. It represents Madonna, with the infant Jesus upon her lap, and a little St. John against her knee. It was dusty, unframed, blackened, but something in it went to my heart. I couldn't tell when or where, but I had seen that picture before. I knew I had seen it. I bought it. I took it to Felicia with the blankets. At sight of it she trembled and sobbed, and said, 'I did not sell the Bible, I did not sell the star,' and begged and prayed the Holy Virgin not to look at her out of that face with those eyes. I tried to make her give to me what she had tried to pawn, but she would not part with, or even show me, any thing. Disheartened, I left her, but resolved to return and find out what secret the half-crazed creature had in her heart, or if the drug alone was responsible for all this excitement and distress. I took the picture out of her sight to my room, and there I struggled with my memory of it, till it tormented me, so that I sent for an artist to examine it. He cleaned it for me, and brought it back, and showed me in the corner the artist's name. 'See,' he said, 'it is a Donaldi,' and down in the



corner was written, 'R. Donaldi, Roma, 186—.' I visited the studios, until I found an old artist who had known Donaldi, and who told me of his career. He had been lost in coming to this country on a steamer that was wrecked off the coast in the year 186—. He had lived previously some years both in Rome and in Florence. He married an American wife, and had two children, who probably met their fate with him. The pawnbroker had bought this picture with a lot of rubbish, at a customs sale of articles that had never been claimed, and I afterward found record of it as unclaimed baggage on a steamer that sailed three weeks after the ill-fated boat. Now, dear Lina, this is my only clew; but I believe that it will lead me to some knowledge of myself and my history. I am going to take a month to go into Italy. If the artist left his family in Italy, I can surely find them; but that Felicia has some association with them I must believe. What it is I must leave you to discover. By watching her closely, you may find her mind clear; and I think her love for you may make her yield the articles which her superstition would not let her pawn. One is a Bible, and I do not know what more. Whatever she knows of the picture, it is, of course, associated with you; and I have written all, that you may not lose any chance with her in her varying moods. I



found the passengers' list of the ill-fated boat, and no mention was made of Donald's family, though his name appeared upon the steerage list."

That the letter almost drove the gladness from her heart for the time, by the knowledge it revealed of the condition of Felicia, was not strange. No sleep came to her, torn as she was by conflicting emotions of joy for herself and sympathy for Don; and pity for the wretched Felicia filled her heart, to the exclusion of any hope for happy discoveries through her means.



## CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Ralph communicated the new joy that had come in the track of his sorrow for his father's loss, Mrs. Darrell's patient eyes were full of happy tears. Adah's delight was like that of a child, that now the friend who had been like a sister to her would be such in name as well as in heart. Only one cloud dimmed the days, and that was the sudden disappearance of Felicia from her home. When Lina went to make her first visit to her she was gone. People in the house told her Matteo was released, and had persuaded her to go away, after staying with her in the house awhile. If this were true, then she had gone of her own free will, and there was nothing to do but to wait till she came back again, as, sooner or later, she was sure to do. Notwithstanding this cruel anxiety, she went back to Hannah with her heart so flooded with the sunshine of love, that she was prepared to gild with it any cloud that might await her there. But, strange to say, when she bent her gentle face down over Aunt Hannah's chair, the old woman's eyes flooded with tears, and she put up her wrinkled hands as if to warm them by the soft warmth of



the girl's velvety cheeks, and drew her face down and kissed her. It was the first since she kissed her own mother's coffined face, a half-century ago. Poor old stricken soul! she would be ashamed of it to-morrow, may be, and be more severe than ever to the girl; but just now she was weak and nervous. And she had missed her so! Only to have her back, she did not care at what price; for the days and nights were endless when Lina was away!

But, strange to say, though Hannah was as bashful as a school-girl, when she saw her next she was no longer hard. The pent-up floods of a heart's whole life-time were too strong for the weakened barriers of jealousy and distrust, and they broke and swept around her brother and the girl with a force that showed how narrow was the channel, as well as how deep the stream.

She began to be better now; and when Ralph came and sat beside her chair, and told her he wanted Lina to be his wife, a scared, anguished look came to her face, but none of the fierce and jealous anger which they feared. "So they would take her away from her, after all!" She felt it at first, but, marvel of grace, she shut her lips together, and never said one word.

From her closed lids the tears crept forth, and her throat worked convulsively, when Ralph said,



"I want to ask you not only to give me your child, but to give me a home as well. Lina will never leave you; I never wish her to leave you; but I do want you to give me a place here, too. Let me come and live with you; I cannot bear to be shut out of the place where she is to stay, and I promise you, she will be to you the same daughter as ever, and I will be to you a son."

And Hannah was not very slow in making up her mind. Secretly, she was glad enough to shout; but habit was strong, and she only answered,

"Well, Lina is a good girl, a sight too good for any man; but she seems to like you, and if you think you could put up with all our ways, why, I've no objections; but there's Loren, he owns half the farm, and he isn't used to having men folks about; but"—she added, with a final gasping effort—"if Loren's willing, I be."

And then she leaned back in her chair, and went to sleep; and Ralph went to report progress of his wooing to Lina and Loren on the porch.

. . . . .  
"Great doin's," the neighbors said, "at Forest Farm!" The old house seemed to have taken a fit of growing, and two long wings spread back into the forest, ending in two octagonal towers, inclosing an enormous court.



“What under the sun that city chap who was hangin’ round Squire Wilde’s was agoin’ to do with a house big enough to hold all creation,” was a problem discussed in field and family and by many a farm-house fire. There were various views; but the old heads “reckoned he knew what he was about,” and thought he “seemed to be pretty consid’able smart for a feller raised in the city;” and perhaps they were not far from right.

Loren had given to Lina the Forest Farm-house, and Ralph was widening its borders, that it might make a summer-home for children of the city tenement house-population of the most needy sort.

One octagon tower held a chapel, the other a school-room and library, where maps and charts, and cabinets, for their botanical, geological, or entomological specimens awaited the collection and arrangement of the children’s own hands. An airy, sunny hospital room for the sick, a great barrack of a play-room for rainy days, a wing for weary mothers with feeble babes—all were comprised under this hospitable roof. The plan included mothers, boys, and girls, and especially working girls, whose wages were needed at home, and whose holidays never came. The first year was supposed to give sufficient training in decent manners and cleanly ways to make it possible that for the second year the women should be



recommended to farmers' homes; and boys, whose good behavior warranted it, might live in forest camps. When admitted to homes, the board of the children might be paid by the Forest Farm fund, and they were still under the protection and supervision of the home, and yet room would be made for new inmates each year. Warm, young hearts were in the scheme, and busy hands and heads were full of its details. And no one was more eager to plan, more fruitful in sensible suggestion, than was Aunt Hannah Wilde. It was her idea that the girls' home should include an industrial department, where they should be taught practically to cook, and to perform other domestic tasks, while the boys were taught the use of tools.

Her strong sense and aggressive spirit delighted in opposing and contradicting their enthusiastic but sometimes impractical plans, showing how proposed methods could not be used, then suggesting other methods by which their views could be carried out. She took comfort in declaring the project would be quite ruined by bad management, especially when she knew Mrs. Darrell was to have the home in charge. Grace and love had not included Mrs. Darrell yet, but what Betsey called the "ripenin'" process was going on. Grace and love were at their work. She was still angry when she thought of the *Amber*



*Star*, and her pride arose fiercely, bidding her upon that subject forever to be still.

“Time enough for Esther to have her when I’m dead and gone,” she would say to herself, with a spiteful shake of her head. “Then I’ll let the heathen bauble be found. Esther has a very comfortable life. She don’t have to sit still and ache in all her bones. She can do without the girl far better than I can. She’s got a good home, and friends and folks enough without Lina, and Lina’s got folks enough without her!”

So she hardened her heart and eased her conscience by resolving to leave to Lina all her property—“every red cent—farm, government bonds, and all.”

It was June when the building was ready for occupancy. Mrs. Darrell and Adah and Mr. Beech, who was to help care for the boys, were already there. Already the groups of boys had taken possession of camps upon the hills, and pale-faced girls might be seen gathering the way-side ferns. There was great activity among the village people, among the young people, particularly, and the children of the village school.

Lina’s friends were all astir at the chapel, and committees of young women received and distributed the boughs of the maples, and armfuls of evergreen



with which the boys came plunging down from the woods from Forest Hill. The "Summer-house" was soon to be formally opened, and the clergy and distinguished representatives of philanthropic endeavor were to come and make speeches, and prayers, and give the enterprise a little patronizing and friendly pat of approval; but this was quite another affair, just a little happy home-time among themselves and the neighboring farmers and the children, the boys and girls who were so fortunate as to be among the first sent out from town. And Don's own boys, who came year after year, were among his most active helpers in caring for the new-comers.

What joyful days of preparation they were! Ralph had been much of the time at Forest Farm since the work began, with Abigail to look after his comfort, and Lina, so near, to be the joy of his leisure hours. He had personally superintended every detail of the preparations; and now, when the last night had come, he fetched Lina and Loren to go over the building with him, to see how lovely it all looked in its garniture of green.

The old Forest Farm-house had been left intact, much to the disgust of the village gossips, who could not understand how a man could spend his money to build a house "big enough for all creation," and not put a cent's worth of any thing new in the part



which he meant for his bride. And such a wife as Lina Wilde would make, too; "nothing was too good for her." Yet it looked very cozy and home-like in the room where the table was laid for tea. As Abigail gave her last touch to the table, she said to herself, with a satisfied air:

"Well, if elbow grease would 'er filled it with new furniture and picters, I'd a done it; but elbow grease was all I had to give. Lord knows I haint stinted them for that! Not one on 'em will ever see that it makes an atom o' difference, not an atom, but I've the comfort o' knowin' it's clean."

Mrs. Darrell was in the tea-room, and Adah, and good Mr. Beech, who on the morrow was to perform the ceremony that made Ralph and Lina one.

They waited tea for Donald, who had sailed in time for the wedding, and who should have been here twenty-four hours ago, and must surely arrive to-night. But when Amos came back from the station, and no Donald, they began to be troubled, and Adah's face was very grave.

"Never mind, sister, there are yet two trains, and he will never disappoint us," said Ralph; "it is not like Don, to do that. Besides, I had a dispatch from him this morning which I was to keep secret; but since you are anxious, I will show it to you."



He produced it from his pocket, and the two girls seized it, both eager to read at once.

“May be delayed to find bridal gift for Lina. How is Adah? Shall be in time.”

“There, now,” he said, pinching Adah’s blushing cheek; “take your tea in peace. You see he is in New York, and is bewildering himself in search of an offering fit for the queen of the *fête*.”



## CHAPTER XXIII.

MUCH as she dreaded to meet Mrs. Darrell, Aunt Hannah would gladly have gone over herself to see the new place in all its festal array; but she feared that if she went to-night, she would not be able to go over for the wedding on the morrow. She could with great difficulty go from room to room; and, seating herself by the window in the room where Loren's mother died, her hands folded over her knitting work, she followed the carriage with her eyes until it was out of sight.

She had grown very old. Her hair, of an iron-gray color, softened somewhat the hard features of her face, which had lost much of its severity under the repeated touches of pain. As she sat thus all alone, her thoughts went back to the day when Loren brought the little stranger home; ay, farther still, to the time when his mother sat here and looked out upon the hills.

She remembered all his patient, noble ways, and a great pang smote her that she, who could and should have helped him to be happy, had always hampered and harassed his life. She had not let him



have Esther's love; she had not let him enjoy, without a strong admixture of human bitterness, the love of the child he had found. She had—even by her own silence, when she should have spoken—by her mean act, kept the child from her mother, while she gave her no motherly love herself.

Memory and conscience joined hands to smite her, and under their scourgings, for her selfish loves and hates, she bowed her head at last and wept. "At last, at last she would undo it, if she could. She would even own it all to Loren, if she must." Slowly she rose, and, taking the lamp in one hand, made her way with tottering steps to the staircase. Up she went, painfully and wearily, one step at a time; on to Lina's room, through the corridor, and then out to the chamber over the shed. A gust of wind blew out the lamp.

Trembling from head to foot, she paused. Were they coming? No; it was the willow on the windows of Lina's room. She fumbled for a match, opened a high drawer of an old chest, felt about in the corner with her withered hands. Again and again she tried, her face growing momentarily more white and haggard; but what she sought for was no longer there—the little Amber Star was gone!

Bowed as if years had been added to her life, she crept back again, more helpless now than ever.



She could not atone. She could give back the child, but the proof was gone. Utterly burdened in mind, and wearied in body, she sat down again, and saw the moonlight flooding the mountains with peace.

Moving figures came up the walk. Loren's broad shadow fell upon the porch alone; behind him the loitering lovers came.

"We lingered a little, for we thought Donald would arrive before we left," said Lina, fearing that she had left Aunt Hannah too long alone. Hardly had she spoken, when the sound of wheels and voices were heard.

"He has come, Lina; Donald has come," said Adah, hurrying in: "and he was so disappointed that you did not wait! He said he must see Lina to-night. So here we are;" and as Don came in, followed by a lady, Lina, surprised and half-frightened, rose to meet Mrs. Darrell, and led her toward her aunt. Lina pressed her hand.

"Don't be frightened," whispered Mrs. Darrell; "Donald would not let me stay behind; he said he had a gift for you, and he wanted me to hear him make his presentation speech."

"The children all seemed so happy to-night," she said, gently bending above Aunt Hannah's chair, "that I thought, since you could not come over to



rejoice with me, I must come to rejoice with you. I hope I don't intrude."

The old lady took both her hands in hers, and while they were all busy greeting Donald, she said, her voice trembling with emotion :

"I do rejoice with you in all their joy, and"—their eyes met—"in yours, Esther; yes, in yours!"

"No welcome for me, Aunt Hannah?" broke in Donald; and before she could resist, he stooped down and kissed her.

"That's not fair," said Adah, pushing him aside; "he's a selfish boy, always stealing the sweets;" and she kissed the old lady on both her cheeks, and straightened her cap, and patted her wrinkled hands.

"Can't help it, Aunt Hannah; I feel like a boy to-night; like having a rousing fire and lots of apples, and sitting around and telling stories."

Loren began at once to poke the coals, for, June though it was, the room was cool; and they soon had a light crackling blaze in Loren's room, which had never seen so merry a party before.

Adah threw herself into a low seat at Aunt Hannah's knees. And Don, opposite, watched her face with a tenderness full of meaning.

Loren suddenly rose, and wheeling Aunt Hannah's chair, as he had often done his mother's, into the center of the circle, he took his seat beside her, and



took one of her wrinkled hands, and held it in a strong, loving clasp, as never once he had held it in his life.

Lina drew her seat to his side; and, as if to get away from the fire, but in reality to save Hannah from the necessity of constantly seeing her face, Mrs. Darrell moved back, just within the shadow of the open door.

And the fire burned cheerily, and made weird figures on the wall behind them, and for a moment silence fell. Each was busy with thoughts that others could not share, and then said Don, briskly:

“Come now, I’m in just the mood for a story, and if no one tells me one, I must tell one myself.”

“Well, let’s have it, Don,” said Ralph.

“Something with a good ending, though,” said Adah; “and something that begins with ‘once upon a time.’”

Don laughed, and looked for a moment as if he were searching for a subject in Adah’s eyes; then suddenly changing his tone and manner to one of deep feeling, he said:

“You all wonder, dear friends, that I am so happy to-night, as if the fact that two of those dearest to me are so glad were not enough of itself to make me glad also; as if the fact that I, who know what it is to be a homeless boy, seeing what a home has been



built for the homeless, what a mother," glancing at Mrs. Darrell, "God has given to welcome the motherless, could fail to rejoice with all my heart."

"Hear, hear! bravo, bravo!" said Ralph, who felt the tearful earnestness in Don's voice, and did not want to cry himself.

Don laughed, and went on:

"If I feel like a boy to-night, and during the rest of the years of my life, it is only my right; for I was defrauded by poverty and pain of my real childhood, and feel now it has been given back to me; as if I had, in my admission to this little circle, mother, sister, brother, friend, and home. To make some of the ties so strongly felt by me, felt also by you, is one of the objects of my story."

"Look out, Adah," said Ralph, shaking his finger threateningly; "there's only one way he can become a brother to me, and I won't give you to him."

For a moment Adah blushed, and hung her head; then lifting her lids roguishly, she said:

"Too late, Master Ralph, too late!"

"Hush, Ralph! you must not interrupt," said Lina, raising a warning finger. "Go on, Donald; don't mind him."

Donald, somewhat embarrassed, continued, and soon tearful eyes were following him, as he told how, on the night after he landed, finding he had some



time on his hands, he went to seek a poor Italian friend, whom he had left in circumstances of great distress. "I found her alone, very ill, greatly agitated and distressed, afraid to die, for she said she was afraid to meet the Mother Mary, to whom she had always prayed for consolation in her sorrows, believing that her life had been so hard, that the Virgin mother would console and pity when she died: 'But now she is angry with me,' she cried, 'and when I sleep her face comes before me, and accuses me of wronging the Child Jesus. I dare not shut my eyes, for I always see her face.'

"She was fast going, and I soothed her, and led her to tell me what was the burden on her heart."

Then followed a rapid outline, in her own words, of the life of Felicia and the child, beginning on shipboard, telling of the years with Matteo, and the disappearance and final discovery of the girl in a farm-house, by wandering organ-grinders, of whom Felicia herself was one.

" 'When the child came to me, around her neck was a little AMBER STAR. I did not take it off, and when she disappeared she wore the little star. When I discovered her in the house among the mountains,' she said, 'when she soothed and nursed me through the night, and promised to care for me always, if I left her an address, I wanted to leave one. But morning came,



and she did not come back again. A woman called me, and said it was time to go. She gave me time to dress myself, and in my desire to find a bit of paper on which I could write, I looked in the drawers of an old desk that stood against the wall. I found a pencil and a crumpled envelope, and hastily wrote the address, and left it at the edge of the open drawer; but I found, also, in feeling about the drawer, a trinket in the corner, a little yellow star. It gleamed like gold, and I hid it in my dress, and took it away. Afterward, I remembered, and knew it was the child's, and I meant to return it to her with the Bible, which I had always managed to conceal from Matteo. But when she came to visit me in sickness, so gentle, so kind, I could not bear to let her know how I had deceived her. I feared she would not love me any more; and now, now I would go on my knees to her all the way to the hills, to give back the Bible and the star.'

"Then I told her," added Donald, "to trust them to me, and promised solemnly to restore them to the owner, and to aid her in every way to find her family and friends. Eagerly, but feebly, she groped under her pillow; and when I drew forth the parcel for her, and held it where she could see and touch it, the poor old creature smiled, and, murmuring broken pleadings to *Maria, Madre Consolata*, died.



"I kept the parcel before her fading sight till her eyes closed. Here it is."

A moment, later he laid it in Aunt Hannah's lap.

"It should be your hands," he said, gently, with a glance that included Loren, "from which she should receive her name, since it was you who bestowed on her your own." But Hannah only clutched the parcel nervously, and fumbled it as if bewildered and blind.

She could not speak; and Adah, fearing the effect of excitement so intense, diverted attention from her, and let them all down from the emotion that threatened tears, by saying,

"Now, Donald, I protest! You begin by playing the boy, and end by assuming the patriarch, and setting us off in hysterics, instead of settling us comfortably in families. Who wants to unearth relatives? Not Lina, I am sure"—Lina had not lifted her face from her hands—"for here am I for a sister, and she has her Aunt and Uncle Loren."

She had always called Hannah, "Aunt Loren," and Hannah, strange to say, had always been pleased to hear her.

"And yet Donald must go rummaging the world for a host of relations. Let's have them all out at once, please! Speak quickly, if you are prepared to pour upon the poor child unnumbered parents and cousins and aunts."



"I have found a brother for her, Adah, though I am not certain he will prove worth taking."

Lina raised her head quickly, and a little stir of expectancy ran through the group.

"He was a naughty boy, who ran away from a kind old lady who gave him a home, and joined his father on a sea voyage to America. The ship went down off the coast of Newfoundland; but an old sailor saved the lad and took him to New York. He brought him ashore in his arms, and his heart clung somehow to the child, who in all the wide world had no other friend to whom he could turn for care. But he was too small to be taken to sea; so Jack, to make sure of not losing him, pricked an anchor in his arm, and cut a section from a little star the child wore on his neck, and sewed the piece in the bottom of his tobacco-pouch, and then left him with a woman who kept a seaman's boarding-house, and gave her his last penny to care for the child till his return. She took the money, and abused the boy almost before his protector was out of sight of land. Then he ran away, which probably the sailor foresaw he would do when he cut a point or two from the star. That sailor was traced through the records on the company's books in Glasgow, as to who of the wrecked ship's crew were saved. His heroic efforts for others before the ship went down were reported



by some of the saved. He is now the captain of a steamer of the same line; and the boy, now grown a man, waited in Glasgow for his ship to make that port. They compared their recollections, and joined their fragments of an *Amber Star*."

All listened intently as Donald went on—each watching his face as if there were no other listener.

"Now, you remember the picture at sight of which the Italian woman was afraid, do you not? It was a picture of a 'Holy Family,' and the artist had used as a model for the Madonna, the face of his wife, the mother of the children at her knees. That picture was marked 'Donaldi—Roma, 186—.' In the Bible yonder is the name of Lina's father. It is the same."

A sudden start, a gasp, and Mrs. Darrell sat gazing at Donald with white, scared face and dilated eyes; but no one noticed either start or look, so intent were all upon the tale he told.

"That same boy had forgotten the name, but he remembered, dimly, the mother's face. He went to Rome. He found the house in which Donaldi lived; the studio where he worked; the balcony where the children played. But he did not find his mother or the baby sister there. He found them, however, reported as having sailed for Glasgow. In Glasgow he learned that they had sailed for America. He



was able to follow his sister to this country, to these mountains, and here"—here his voice faltered brokenly—"to this—fireside, and—" but before he could go on Lina was at his side, in his arms. He held her in silence a moment, and only a low sound of suppressed sobbing was heard.

"I believe I could bring you a far better gift, sister," he added, tenderly, as he gave her back to Loren. I hoped to find our mother, too; I pictured often the hour when I should bring her to you; but though I traced her from Italy to Scotland, from Scotland to New York, and from the steamer to the hospital, I lost her there. The registers were at my disposal, but the name 'Donaldi' was not there. We have both known motherly love and kindness such as many children who have not been orphaned never knew; but for a sight of our mother's face—well, we must wait for heaven for that!

"Then heaven is much nearer than we think, dear Don," said Ralph, rising hastily, and laying his hand on Donald's arm. "Sit down, Don—sit down; I want to tell a story myself."



## CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL drew a long breath of relief, and Ralph, in his rapid, eager way, began :

“When I was abroad, haunting the hospitals, I stopped for a time in Glasgow, waiting for another medical student to join me for a tour through the Highlands; and one Sunday, as I was coming out from church, a sudden shower arose, and an aged woman, wrapped in a long cloak, slipped and fell on the damp pavement. And I had the good fortune to pick her up, and to offer the protection of my arm and my umbrella to her door. Before we reached it she seemed to be suffering, and when I told her I was a physician, she consented to let me examine and bandage her wrist, which she had sprained severely, but which she had concealed beneath her cloak. This little service led to an acquaintance, almost to a friendship; for the old lady seemed to take a great fancy to me, especially when she learned that I was a stranger far from home. She was an odd mixture of unrelenting integrity and a severe sort of tenderness and care. It was not long before she confided to me that she ought to have a laddie of her



own to lean upon now she was old. She had two, but they were both drowned in the sea; and since she knew it, her old heart had been—‘sair, sair, always sair and lane’—and she had a soft heart toward the ‘laddies wha had nae hame.’ She was old; she had a moderate fortune; she meant to leave it in trust to be used for bairns; but first, she needed to know if one of her ‘ain’ did not leave behind a widow and a child. If these were living, she must care for them; if dead, she must care for many bairns, to atone for being over hard with her ain! Little by little she told me she had been so full of fear for their souls, that she had driven them ‘awa’ from hame.’ She gave me names, and besought my aid in finding if the widow and daughter of her nephew were in New York. Her nephew’s name was Donaldi. His boy was called Lorenzo Donaldi. His mother called him Lorrie—(Loren gave Esther a grateful glance—she had at least cared enough to give her boy his name)—which the old aunt spelled Lawrie, and said he should grow up without the foreign terminations, simply Lawrie Donald, which was Scotch enough even for her. She mourned for this child as her heart’s last hope; and without for a moment associating him with my Don Lawrie, I yet came home, promising to make all inquiries concerning his mother and sister. I traced her as Donald



did to the hospitals; I went farther. I found the city death records of that year contained several entries of that name. I wrote that the clew to the widow of Roberto Donaldi ended at the hospital gate; that probably the mother was dead, and that the child could not be found. Not long after, news came to me of the old lady's sudden death. If, within a certain time no heir was discovered, the property was to be devoted to the purpose she had named to me.

“Meantime advertisements for descendants or relations of Miss Margery Carruth appeared in both English and American journals. To one appearing in the *New York Times* of recent date, the executor in Glasgow received the following reply, dated New York, April 20, 186—. It is written by a lady who claims to be the widow of Roberto Donaldi, who herein declares her belief that her daughter is now living, and begs that the disposition of the estate be deferred until the identity of this child may be clearly proved. For herself, the mother asks nothing from the estate; but she pleads with great earnestness for delay in behalf of this child. She gives the events of her own life since her husband's death, explains the circumstances under which she came to be known by an assumed name, forwards her maiden name, and a copy of her marriage certificate. If we



find the writer of that letter, Donald, we have found your mother, and the maiden name given here is the one written in Lina's Bible, and the signature of this letter is, 'Esther Burgess Donaldi.' So you see, my dear Don, that your mother is this side heaven!"

"Thank God!" said Don, fervently; "but where? Surely some one must know!" And while he spoke, Hannah's tall figure rose from her seat, and her long arms reached out toward the corner where Mrs. Darrell sat trembling and shivering in the dark,

"There she is, children; God knows her, and I know her!" And she sank back in her seat, saying, in husky tones, "Go to your mother, Lina; Esther, take back your child!"

But Esther only gazed with a strange light in her countenance, as if she had seen a heavenly vision, and her lips trembled and made no sound; and, before Lina could spring to her embrace, she had fainted in the arms of her son.

Softened as it had been for her ear, the joyful story was too much for her full heart to bear. The children's arms were around her, and their kisses fell on her icy hands. But it was not until Don gathered her up in his strong arms, and carried her out on the porch, that her heart gave to her new joy the answer of words and tears. Here they sat silent under the stars, till Adah stole away from Ralph's side by the



window, and came and stood demurely by Donald's side. He threw one arm about her and she knelt down in the moonlight and said, in the sweet, child-like way that won and held all hearts,

"Please to take me in, too, for I am going to be one of your children soon."

The mother lifted happy eyes to those of her son, who answered with a smile, and then she took the bright face in her hands and kissed it.

"Three children! it is more than a heartful, is it not?"

"No, leave room for me, too," said Ralph, "or I will run away with Lina, and leave you only two!"

"Ah! your place was made long ago, dear Ralph," she said; and, looking up, she saw Loren and Hannah standing at the window behind them. Esther arose and went to them.

"I cannot thank you, Hannah," she said; and Hannah, with a touch of her old manner, broke forth:

"Don't try, Esther; no thanks to me; I didn't let any good news get to you a minute 'fore I was obleeged to; I'm a kind of cross-grained old maid; but I feel as if you and Loren and all the rest were my children and grandchildren, and had come home for Thanksgiving."

And, afraid of showing any more feeling, she



hobbled away to her bedroom. Lina stole in and tenderly cared for her, as usual, and kissed her good-night with a silent hug, and when she came back, her mother was in Loren's mother's chair, and he was talking to her.

"My cup runneth over," she said; "I have all my heart's desire."

"Is it so? Then if you are happy, I am content!"

Glad in her gladness, he did not know he had attained any thing above the common experience of life; yet he knew the noblest type of love. There were volumes to be talked to each other, yet they were strangely silent, sitting in the moonlight now that the fire was done. It was not very late, though they seemed to have lived years since the mountaintops were red with the light of the setting sun.

"How wonderfully has God brought us," said Loren, as they parted at midnight. "Can we, who have seen our dear ones brought up out of the depths, do enough for the children whose only cradle is the Everlasting Arms, and who suffer so sorely before they reach even that?"

"No, we can never do enough, mother mine," said Donald; "but we have made it our life-work, and we mean to carry on our hearts as many of His little ones as we can bear." . . .

Many children's voices sang the wedding hymn



that June morning, when Ralph and Stella and Donald and Adah were wed.

The chapel was lovely in its garniture of leaves and ferns, and little girls strewed the path of the bridal party to the altar with flowers gathered by their own hands from meadow and brookside and wood.

Aunt Hannah, in a cap that she called a "city notion," sat stately in a great arm-chair, wheeled to her place by an escort of Donald's boys.

Esther's pale face shone with a strange tender joy, and Loren looked the noble gentleman he was, as he gave Ralph's bride away. They were fair brides to look upon; and as they passed down the aisle, Hannah's sharp eyes caught in Esther's hair the gleam of a little golden star.

It was a strangely peaceful hour, for to almost every soul since yester-morn had opened a new world. New conditions and relations and facts surrounded them; they had entered new realms of love and inspiration, which should flood with benediction the lives of others, simply from their own hearts' overflow. The hour was like a seal set on the old life; like a seal broken to the unread pages of the new.

After the greetings were over, and the village guests had gone to the feast in the great hall below, Ralph drew Lina away from the little group in her



mother's parlor, to a staircase that led them to the floor above the octagon chapel. Opening a door before her, he said, gently :

"Come home, Stella, my star! We are going to stay at Aunt Hannah's when we are in the country; for you know I promised not to take you from her; but I thought I would make up here above the chapel a nest for my bird, whenever she wants to be, indeed, at home. See, it is alone, away from the bustle of the house, yet near enough for all its work."

Too happy for any thing but bewildered looks and smiles, she followed through the tiny suite of rooms, the library filled with books and dainty pictures, with a desk by the window that overlooked the hills; the dining-room only large enough for very few and not too large for two—her own nooks, where no one could find her. Stella was too delighted to speak.

"All my own?" she asked, at last.

"Yes, all your own; a place in which to rest and to be happy; to read, to study, to refresh heart and brain, in order that we may the better give out our life to those who need it."

"O, I am quite glad, Ralph. You have given me every thing, and I have nothing to bring to you."

"But yourself?"

"But myself, and—O, I forgot," she said, blush-



ing; "I have a little fortune of my own yet, though even that I owe to you."

She drew from her pocket a tiny box, and opening it, revealed a bright silver half-dollar. Ralph looked puzzled.

"Do you remember when you gave it to me?" she said.

"I! no, I never gave it to you."

"Yes, you did; one chilly night, when I was cold and hungry, you gave it to me to buy me shoes."

"Lina! you?"

"Yes, Ralph, I am the child for whom you almost gave your life; it is right that I should give mine to you."

"Can I come in, Mrs. Lindsay?" called Adah.

Lina blushed at sound of her new name; but Ralph answered:

"Come up, Mrs. Donald; you are no stranger to the rooms."

"No, indeed," said Adah. "We have had such a lovely time, mamma and I," she said, turning to Mrs. Donald, who had come up also. "And we have talked books full about every one of these draperies and pretty objects—have we not?"

"Did you help to make it all so lovely for me, too?" asked Stella of her mother; "how good you all are!"

"How happy I am to have a child for whom to do



it!" she said; and Stella kissed her, and whispered, "Precious mother!"

Ralph opened a door leading out of Stella's parlor into an adjoining room, and said:

"We had intended to give the use of Forest Farm-house to Mrs. Darrell; but I thought, after last night, that we should want her to have a niche in our very own home, to which she can retire when she wearies of the world of children outside; so I have set aside this room for her. It will be left for you to fit it up as you please."

"We are going to help—Don and I," said Adah; "and see, he has begun already to make it home!" She pointed upward, and there, over the mantel, hung the picture of the Madonna and Child."

"You see we have made a shrine for our saint," said Don. "She has indeed been 'Madra Consolata,' a mother of consolation to us!"

"I cannot realize it, it all seems so strange," said Lina, "that I, once homeless, motherless, unloved, should inherit all, all in a day—mother, brother, husband, home, and love—why, how could I have more in heaven?"

"You can make this heaven by keeping your love and joy so near to God that they overflow and brighten the troubled world," said Loren, gently putting his hand on hers.



And she turned and looked up into his eyes, clear and tender as a child's, and said :

“That's what you have done, Uncle Loren ; and the comfort of my whole life has come from that overflow.”

“Well, then, so far it is good to have loved and suffered ; for just so far as another has been blessed by us, has God made a channel for divine love in our souls.”

And after this they talked no more. . . .

As the years sped on the Forest Home prospered, and overflowed into the homes of the farmers, who began to be glad to take the children in. Another home went up in a neighboring town for invalid mothers and sick children. Nurses were trained. The country girls were pressed into service as teachers of the day and sewing schools, while pale young women from the cities picked blackberries, and grew rosy on the pastures and on the hills.

Aunt Hannah's kitchen became a training-school ; and she, unable to walk, sat in the chair, and taught girls to cook, to iron, to sew ; and under the discipline her soul grew patient and white, and truly “ripened” for the better land.

Uncle Loren was the patriarch of the Home, and all the boys loved him. Little girls rolled and rollicked in his hay-fields, and rode on his cart. The



girls imposed upon him, but his clear eye held the boys; and when, at night, he came to the Home, and led the assembled family in prayer, they knew he held in his soul the secret of Christian power.

And when he fell asleep, after many days, ferns and autumn leaves filled his grave, scattered by childish hands, and his loving presence lingered long among his native hills.

Loren's little store of worldly wealth came to the Forest Home. Aunt Carruth's money went also for the children; but it was spent on Scottish soil, in helping widows to rear their sons; in helping boys every-where, who were willing to help themselves. It became a Loan Fund; and, managed with wisdom and care, resulted in practical good to many and many a "bairn."

If more of it went to "Waif-land" than might have seemed good to some cautious philanthropists, it was because Donald knew what it was to be a waif in a city of strangers. Once a year he went with Adah to Europe. But while their acquaintances went wandering from city to city, and came home laden with the luxuries of Paris, they spent much time among the poor little souls of "Waif-land," and came home clad in the garments of peace, and crowned with the joy of those who, "having done it unto the least" of his, have done it unto Him.



A FAIR HALF-DOZEN.







# A FAIR HALF-DOZEN.

---

## CHAPTER I.

ONLY half a dozen. That's a small number. Ah, but half a dozen pretty girls! It means a great deal. Six pairs of eyes with youth in them. It warms an old heart to think of their sparkle and glow! Six pairs of smiling lips—all talking at once, I must confess—and six pairs of hands ready and eager for their work.

They were all together around the fire in a pleasant room, half-salon and half-library—a room that looked as if occupied every day, and kept warm and bright with cheerful human presence. Cloaks and gloves lay carelessly on sofas and chairs, as if their owners had not come to stay. Yet they suited the cheery room, these bright young faces, and it's hardly fair to introduce it to my readers with them there, lest they like the place less well when they are gone. But for the present they linger and talk and smile, with all the beautiful vivacity of unspent, unwearied lives; and we linger and listen, whether we care what they



are saying or not—linger and listen, because the sight and sound are fair.

Before one had time to turn one's mind from the manner to the matter of their talk, the draperies separating this room from the next moved, and, slowly, a large arm-chair was wheeled forward into the room.

“Ah! here she comes, here's our little queen!” And with one impulse they surrounded the chair, giving its occupant an affectionate, almost a boisterous, greeting. Pushing the servant aside, they drew the chair to the table, and placed within the occupant's reach a large stand of engravings.

“There now, little queenie, is the throne comfortable?” asked Helen Marsh, a merry-looking girl, as she readjusted the cushions, while another brought a footstool.

“Quite right, thanks, dear Nellie; but you are all too kind. I ought to be here in my place before my class is assembled, but this morning I have been very sadly detained.

“Sadly?” asked Grace Merrill, in a sympathetic voice, that echoed the tone as well as the word.

“How, good Queen Madge?” broke in mischievous Dorothy Hall; why do you let your majesty give audience to beggars, when—”

“This was no beggar,” interrupted the invalid.

“Perhaps not, but you do let them come, you



know you do ; and, if not a beggar, this was somebody with a misery."

Margaret Heath smiled, and shook her head.

"O, yes it was," insisted Ruth Nelson, shaking her finger playfully ; "I knew somebody had been telling you a sad tale the moment I saw your face."

"And to think of your listening, when here were your loyal subjects waiting to do you homage !" said a tall girl, who had not yet spoken, as she took from her belt a cluster of violets, and laid them in the lap of her friend.

"Waiting rather to spoil me utterly," said Margaret, with a loving glance that included the group ; "you would make me the most self-indulgent of women, if I let you have your way."

"I only wish that we might," whispered Ruth Nelson, who had not once left her place at Margaret's side. "You suffer enough without hearing any thing about the sufferings of others."

"O my dear little Ruth, how can you say that ? what would my suffering be worth if it did not make me sorry for others ? But," and she paused suddenly, "I didn't mean to talk about this, though I have often wished I dared to talk to you about it, and now it's past the time for our lesson."

"O, never mind the lesson, queenie," said Helen, "if you don't feel in the mood for it. You look



tired already, and, much as we love it, we would rather have a little of Margaret than a great deal of art. Isn't it so, girls?"

The others promptly responded by pushing the portfolios beyond Margaret's reach.

For a moment she leaned her head rather wearily back upon the cushion, and closed her eyes. They softened their voices, and quieted the fun.

She was not much older than the eldest of them, and yet her abundant brown hair showed gray threads about the temples. Her large gray eyes were full of intelligence and feeling. The mouth, very sweet in repose, showed a singular combination of tenderness and strength, and the whole face would have had a character of quiet reserve, if the eyes had not betrayed it often by too ready tears. By no fancy could she have been thought pretty. The slight figure, diminutive in height and bowed by suffering, had not a grace save the fine carriage of the head, and the almost constant movement of the restless white hands. She talked with her hands. They were the only motion vouchsafed to her, and she used her privilege well. There was something in her touch that made her queen, for she held an invisible scepter. If they brought to her a fretful child, her caresses quieted it to slumber. When the girls, as sometimes occurred in their merry controversies, passed over the bounds



of perfect courtesy into a region of unkind criticism, she said nothing, but the one nearest was sure to feel that gentle touch on the arm.

Once she took between her hands the hard palm of one of her father's laborers, and the rough man vowed that the hand she had touched should never again lift the cup, she had begged him to abandon, to his lips. She used these hands constantly with needle and pen; and when her friends urged her to rest, she said,

"They are my only weapons; and you, who can put on the whole armor, and go about the world to find your work, must not hinder their doing with their might whatever they find to do."

These young girls were her friends, who had lived near her from childhood, and they had all been educated at the same school. During those school-days, the blithest and brightest of them all was Margaret Heath. When a very little girl, her tiny figure, and the peculiar grace and activity of her movements, made the other children always choose her, if in their games they wanted a fairy queen, and she never lost that charm that made her chosen and petted and loved. She carried off the honors of her class, and the hearts of her companions and friends as well.

School over, her father took her abroad, and her thoughtful mind passed from books to the study of



the wonderful European world. A few months in England, and then they went on to the Continent, entering Switzerland in early June. And there it was that the accident occurred which wrecked the frail little body, till for a time it seemed as if the soul could not be made to stay within.

It was no new and startling tale. Such things had occurred before. Only a careless driver, passing over from the heights of Chamounix to Martigny, by the pass of the Tête-Noire, let his horses run too near the edge of the precipice, and the carriage was overturned. Mr. Heath, his sister, a maiden lady, who held in his household the place to Margaret of her dead mother, had escaped; but Margaret was so injured that for weary weeks life flickered and seemed loath to stay. Then it crept back slowly to heart and brain, and to the gentle eager hands; but, though all that medical skill and tenderest solicitude prompted was done, they knew she never would walk again.

There was no one of her friends whose heart was not so tender toward her as almost to break to tell her this; but she read it under their encouraging smiles, and heard her doom under the cheeriest tone of their voices. She felt it in the tenderness of all their ministrations. They took her southward, and she sat on the beach, or lay under the olive-trees at



Cannes by day, and sobbed out her disappointment over the broken life at night, when there was no answer but the soft break of the sea upon the sand.

It was no light thing to lay down her girlhood and all the unfolded hope of her womanhood, and those who loved her watched lest the struggle should prove too violent for her strength. But, little by little, they saw traces of the Refiner's presence by the side of the furnace fires. Little by little they saw submission and faith and love steal up from her heart, and overflow at lips and eyes; and, when she reached Italy, and went eagerly to work with the best teachers they could procure at the study of art, they took courage, and no longer felt that, for her, life had come to the end.

At the close of two years they brought her home, and again there came around her the friends of her youth, and the companions of her girlish life. She could not go out, but much that was socially delightful came to her, and those who at first came, bringing their pitying tribute to suffering, found that delightful hours were still to be enjoyed by the side of Margaret Heath.

None discovered this more quickly than did the five girls who met together in the room at the time of the opening of our tale. Playfully they still called her their queen, and, one after another, she bound



them to her by the strong but gentle cords of her loving interest, until there was no sweeter spot to them than her room, haunted though it oft might be, by the shadow of her pain. At first they came separately, to tell her of their amusements and enjoyments in society, and to bring whatever they thought would enliven a weary hour, till, one by one, they found they were gathering more than they scattered, taking far more than they brought. Then they came, two or three at the same time, to talk or read with Margaret, and finally it settled into their spending a morning weekly, all together in her parlor. No one of them had been abroad, and the result of her experience and observation gave them great delight. They laughingly formed themselves into an art class, and read and studied the history of art together, each bringing whatever she could find that would interest and instruct, but relying chiefly upon Margaret, who pursued with vigor the studies begun abroad, and whose every item of knowledge gained was only another gift to be gladly shared with them. They were not all daughters of wealthy parents. Only two of the five, Helen Marsh and Edith Grant, knew the gay winters in society, and the gay summers at the sea-shore or the mountains. Dorothy Hall was the daughter of a clergyman; Grace Merrill, a teacher in the school from which they



were graduated ; and Ruth, the daughter of a widow, was a day governess in the house of her mother's friends.

There was a mutual understanding among the five, that, if at any time they found Margaret too feeble for the lesson, they should abandon it for the hour, without forcing her to say so, and this particular morning they could not fail to see that she was still under the influence of some painful emotion, and that her mind was engrossed with something of more vital interest than the history of art. So they gently led her away from it ; and, when she opened her eyes, after resting a few moments, they had settled into a very quiet group.

"I am ashamed of myself, girls," she said, smiling, her eyes shining through the tears ; "but the truth is, I have been wanting the service of my feet so much this morning that I have unfitted myself for service with hands or head."

"Why, what do you want of your feet, you naughty queen ?" asked Grace, kissing her, "when your business is to stay here enthroned, and be fed, like the queen bee in the hive, while there are ten feet waiting impatiently to run for you."

"Ah ! but I could not send them where I would go. They cannot run in my shady ways."

"What are your ways, Queen Madge ?" asked



Dorothy ; "you have no need to go to and fro in the earth. All that's lovely in life will come to you right here, and just be laid at your feet, dearie."

"Yes," broke in Edith, "you are like the spider in its parlor ; you have only to say 'Come in' to any fly you want. Tell us upon what particular fly you have fixed your tender little heart now, and we will away for it at once !"

Margaret laughed, but her voice was very serious and sweet when she spoke again, and they drew near and listened gravely when she said,

"Yes, girls, I am in no mood for the art talk this morning, delightful as it is. I have been thinking that we are not doing quite the right thing to spend so much time as we do just for our own pleasure, and I was wishing we could do something for people outside, people who are less fortunate than we are."

"You wouldn't give up the club, would you?" asked Ruth.

"No ; but I would let more people share it."

"What ! and just spoil all our own delight?" asked Helen.

"Would it spoil our pleasure to give pleasure to another?" asked Margaret.

"That depends upon what the other might be like," said Dorothy, archly.



“Very true,” said Grace; “but Margaret wouldn’t invite any one who wouldn’t be an attractive addition to our circle.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Edith. “Now, Margaret has a dear little mania of her own, just as sweet and lovely as it can be in theory, but very uncomfortable in practice, about doing—”

“Doing as she would be done by,” broke in Dorothy.

“Yes, and she would be sure to invite two or three girls of that sort.”

“Of what sort?” asked Margaret, smiling.

“Why, you know, dear, of—well, not *our* sort.”

“You mean, girls, to whom it would do good to come?” said Edith.

“I don’t know, Ruth. That *would* be our sort, wouldn’t it?”

They laughed, but Ruth replied,

“Yes; but, then, we wouldn’t like to come just to have good done to us, or *I* would not, and I don’t think poorer girls take kindly to any thing they feel is done just for the sake of their good. I’m sure I would not profit by such condescension.”

“Why need there be any condescension in inviting six more girls, even if they are very poor, or are working girls, to pass the morning with us?”

“Could you invite them as friends?” asked Helen.



"As my friends," answered Margaret, gently. "Why not? One of the noblest American women I know, living for many years in Italy, asked me one day if I would like to come to her studio on a certain day, and meet some of her Italian friends; she said they were of a class with which I might not otherwise come in contact, but friends to whom she was at home always on Friday mornings. I went; I found her visitors were the very, very poor; haggard women, sickly children, young girls who needed advice; men out of work, and boys who came to show her their progress in tasks which she had set the previous week. I wish I could describe to you the gracious, simple courtesy with which she treated them, without ostentation, or the faintest touch of condescension. They were her friends."

"I can see how she was their friend, but not how they could be friends for her," said Edith.

"Wait till some sickness or trouble came to her, and you would see; their friendship was as true and real as if existing in the hearts of those who have wealth and name."

"Do you not think the girl one would like to help knows perfectly well that those who labor in her behalf do not care for her, except as a representative of a lower class, whom they philanthropically would like to see elevated?" asked Grace.



“Yes, I think they know it, whenever it is true that no one really cares.”

“Is it not always true?” asked Dorothy.

“Not always; it was not so with the lady of whom I spoke.”

“You think she really cared?”

“Certainly she did, and so should we, if we only allowed ourselves to know them. I am sure you would care if you had heard the story told me this morning—a story of a girl of our own age, one like ourselves, except in the accident of birth.”

“Tell us; can you?” asked Dorothy, slipping her hand in Margaret’s.



## CHAPTER II.

"I ONLY wish you could have heard the mother tell of it," said Margaret, softly. "She came here this morning, a little while before you came, a pale, gentle woman, with a face as sweet as my own dear mother had before she went away, and she asked for me. I saw her, and she told me, with some choking of voice, that she was the seamstress at Mr. Lord's, on the street just below us, the rear of whose house is overlooked by our own. She said her daughter, who had been a compositor in a printing-house, had fallen ill with one hemorrhage after another. And Mrs. Lord had allowed her to come and share her mother's little attic at the rear of the house. She said she thought her gaining, but I could see the mother's heart had many fears. Now, that girl sits at that back window, and looks out upon our conservatory, and sees the green leaves, and longs for a sight of the flowers that are hidden by the foliage from her view. She sees, once in a while, a blossom or a bit of color, and is like a little child in her delight. And when she has the cough, and the fever is high in the night, she talks of the place as if it



were heaven, and begs to go in among the trees, and to smell the fragrance of the flowers.”

“‘But, my dear woman,’ I asked, ‘has she had no flowers in her sickness?’ and I thought, with a pang, of my perfume-laden room, and I wanted to run and gather my roses for her at once. And her mother said, ‘No, she has had no flowers in sickness nor in health, either. She is seventeen years old, and she has never seen the country in her life.’ And she told me she had only seen flowers in the windows, and that before she died she wanted to touch a flower.”

Little exclamations of surprise and pain broke from the group as Margaret went on: “Her father had been a compositor; he had taught his daughter to set type when she was a mere child. When she was only thirteen he died, leaving the mother with feeble health, and this girl, the eldest of five children. Her father’s employers gave her work, child as she was, and made it light at first; but, after a little, they forgot she was not a woman, and when there was a press of work, there was often night work for her, as for the rest. The business changed hands; she must do her share or drop out. The mother did what she could with plain sewing, but this girl, no older than we are, was the only breadwinner in the home. And poor enough the home



was, and often the food was scanty and bad, and the room where she worked was damp, and at night their garrets were cold. Then came the scarlet fever, and the baby and the youngest daughter died. Then it was that the mother let the boys go to the half-orphan asylum, where she pays their board out of her wages, and found a place for herself in a family as seamstress. And yet, girls," said Margaret, "what do you think she asked of me?"

"Not money!" said Edith, "I am sure."

"Not money, but that this poor girl might, when the days grew warm and sunny again, if she had strength enough to come round the corner, go in and sit down for a few moments where she can see and touch the flowers. Think of it, girls"—and Margaret's voice faltered—"she never had a flower or a bright book, or heard a strain of music, or saw a picture in her life. Think of those years of work, of this early death—worn out, worked out, starved out almost, for the sake of the mother and the little brothers and sisters, and tell me if you wonder that I want that girl for my friend. I want to look in her face, and hear her voice, and know how she lived, and see how she can die, for I honor such a life, and I know it must be a happy death."

"Yet it ought not to have come," said Ruth, solemnly.



"No, it ought not," said Margaret; "somebody in all the great world should have known, should have cared, should have saved her."

"And the saddest thing about it is, that this case is only one!" said Helen.

"Only one of the many," said Margaret; "and I think if we are able to do nothing for her, that we have something to do for the rest."

"If only we knew how!" said Grace, doubtfully.

"We must learn," said Margaret.

"And you will teach us, Margaret; you shall direct, and we will obey. Shall it be so, little queen?"

"No, not so; but I will work with you as I can, and you will help me, I know. We are only six young girls, but we are going to do something for the multitudes of girls and children who have less to bless them than God has given us. Is it not a compact, my friends?"

"Yes, yes," they said, catching the glow of her bright spirit; "only, queenie, you must surely lead. We will be as loyal and industrious as any bees ever sent forth to gather honey."

"You shall be sent to distribute it, instead," she said.

"Then the sour old world will be the sweeter for



our living," laughed Dorothy, who could not be serious too long.

"That it must, Dot; and that the sweetness may begin at once, I want you and Ruth to be off to the conservatory, and cut the loveliest roses that you can find."

"O, Margaret, can I take them?" asked Helen, eagerly.

"Yes, you shall take them, and the girls shall wheel me to the window, and perhaps we can see her when her hand first touches a rose."

No sooner said than done. The chair was wheeled into the deep recess of the window and the heavy curtains withdrawn. Very soon Edith cried out, "O, look, there she is! that must be the one!" and all eyes were turned to a window on the fourth floor of the opposite house, where sat a pale young girl, with her head resting on a pillow that had been placed on the back of her chair. She seemed languid and weary, and her eyes wandered over the long row of houses, and at last settled contentedly upon the glass roofs of the conservatory of Margaret's home. They watched carefully, after Dot and Helen had departed, with their hands full of flowers, and suddenly they saw the head raised from the pillow, the arms outstretched, and the thin hands laden with roses, which again and again she kissed, and then,



bowing her face among them, they knew that she was watering them with her tears. There were not many dry eyes in the bay window, and one by one the girls bade Margaret "good-bye," and went away.

"Remember Wednesday morning," she whispered, and they answered with a kiss.

The fire was burning brightly, the portfolio was open, the invalid chair and its occupant were already by the table, when the next Wednesday morning came round. The girls came in one after another, their bright faces and cheery voices making a happy light and a pleasant sound in the quiet apartment. Greetings over, they were all eager to hear what Margaret had thought out as a little plan of work, by which they might hope to be of use, but she drew their attention first to the portfolio, saying,

"I do not want to drop our pleasant work among the pictures, dear girls; but I have acted upon our suggestion of last week, and decided to change the plan of our study a little. For example, I want each one of you to invite for next week one other girl. That will make our number eleven, and I will watch my invalid neighbor at the window, and, if the day is fine and she is strong enough, she shall make the twelfth. So if there is any good to be gained, or any pleasure to be enjoyed, we shall have doubled it at least."



"O, how lovely!" exclaimed several voices; but Dorothy made a wry face and pretended not to be pleased.

"So Jacob is to have Esau's blessing?" she asked.

"No, Esau is to share his birthright with the younger members of the family; that is all," answered Margaret.

"But why don't you make the selection, Queen Madge?" asked Grace; "you know more girls who would profit by the hour than we do."

"For that very reason I do not wish to choose for you. I want you to be interested in the girls who are chosen to share our pleasure. If we do not know a single girl to whom it would be an advantage, then to find one will be the very part of the work to do us good."

"That's true, queenie, you are always right. It may not be agreeable, but it will be best to find our own cases."

"Not our cases, girls, but our new friends."

"Well, our friends, then," said Edith, laughing.

"Yes, I want you each to take the trouble to find one young girl, who shall be your special interest and care. Some of us will not have to seek; we already know too many to whose lives we could give an interest and charm. For these the work is one of selection."



"But how?" asked several at once. "By what shall we be governed?"

"Well, not by our personal likes or fancies or attractions; but, first, choose some girl who would not be likely to have opportunities such as we enjoy; the girl who is limited in advantages and in time. Secondly, choose one who feels her need, and would like to improve. You can each find one."

"I know a dozen," said Ruth.

"And I," answered Helen.

The rest were silent, and Margaret went on:

"That's well, and it is better for us who do not know some one, to open our eyes to the condition and circumstances of those around us. We go on our way, live our own lives, and are as ignorant as little children of the lives of others who pass us in the street, or sit beside us in church. We need to see what other girls have to do and to bear; and, when we have found one whose lot is harder than our own, we shall wish to lift the load."

"But how shall we ask them?" said little Dot. "We wouldn't want them to know we meant to do them good."

"O, that's easy enough," answered Helen.

"But how?" persisted Dot.

"Why, we hope to get as much good as we give. Why not first say, that dear Miss Heath invited us to



come and look over her portfolios, and learn about pictures, and we found it so pleasant that we thought it would be so for others, so we were each to invite a friend."

"Yes, yes, that will do, something like that," said Ruth; "but now, girls, here is another puzzle. The girl *I* want is pretty as a pink. She is in my mother's Sunday-school class, and so attentive and eager to learn. Now, that girl has not a good dress in the world, nothing better than an old black cashmere, faded to a rusty brown; and what do you think, Queen Margaret? Would she come in that frock?"

Yes, yes," answered Grace; "you can just say carelessly that we all come in our old frocks, that nobody makes herself fine, or something like that."

"Then see that you make that true," said Margaret. "We need not make ourselves untidy, but we needn't wear our brooches and bracelets, to shine in the eyes of girls who never had a pretty thing in their lives."

"The truth is," said Edith, "as mamma says, that American young girls wear too much jewelry and too costly fabrics. No young German girl ever appears in velvets on the promenade. Laces and jewels are unknown to the French demoiselle till after marriage. But we wear all we can get of finery as soon as we can get it."



“Well, some of us can safely do that,” laughed the bright young governess. “We need all we can get as soon as we can get it, and sometimes before; and she glanced at her own neat dress, turned and cut over from her mother’s half-worn gown.”

“Perhaps,” said Helen, gently, “we can find a way to make the difference in attire less marked after awhile.”

“Yes,” said Margaret, “after awhile; but we want to separate from this scheme all element of charity, of patronage, of condescension. We have pleasant hours; we invite other young friends to share them. By and by, if we find life is hard for our new companions, we can find ways to help without hurting the self-respect of those we would aid. But all that must be an after-thought. You find your girls; if they are at work, so that they cannot meet at our hour, we will change it. We will change also the plan of work a little, so as to include all in what we are trying to do. Heretofore I have taken the pictures, and told you all I had learned or read of them, and of the artists who painted them. Now, I am going to give you a picture as a topic, which you can mention to the other half-dozen, who for the first time must be listeners, of course, but who will, in this way, feel that if they can learn or read some little fact illustrative of the subject, it will be valued by us all. Thus they will



have at once the incentive to inquire, and the joy of giving us all profit and pleasure."

"But if they haven't access to books often, or time to read them?"

"No matter; the lack of books can be met, and it is a good thing when any mind wakes to the consciousness of wanting to know something that is not easy to find. Now, for to-day, our time is all gone. I'm going to lend you this picture of Leonardo da Vinci's 'Last Supper,' about which, and its creator and his time and his school of art, I wish you would each have some little thing to tell me. Bring your friends, and we will talk all about it together, and so get acquainted with them; and next week they will be eager to bring us something themselves."

They crowded about her chair, and kissed her, and thanked her, and all talked together of this new and lovely plan to bless the lives of others.

"Can we take flowers to the sick girl to-day?" Edith.

"Yes, indeed. She has had them every day so far, and she is better and stronger this week, so her mother tells me. And by the way, girls, I have spoken to papa, and he consents to my sending out every morning from the conservatories five bunches of flowers to the sick, so that there will be a bunch for each one of you, any morning, when you choose



to call and take it yourselves to any friend who is ill. The gardener grumbled a good deal over the waste, and said, I should be ruining the plants; so I have arranged for him to cut the flowers, and have them ready every morning at nine."

"O, you are a wonderful fairy queen!" said Edith, stopping her mouth with kisses.

"O, that will be delightful!" said Ruth. "I can come for mine on the way to my pupils."

"And there's poor little Biddy Dolan, our washer-woman's child, down with the asthma, shut up in the house all day," broke in Helen.

"Well, you can have the roses, if you will make your feet run instead of mine, to take them to those who will be cheered by their fragrance. If we can brighten thirty chambers of pain every week, it will surely be a blessed work."

"Well, we could not do it but for you," said Grace.

"Nor could I do it but for you; so we serve each other, and get the sweetness of serving others together as well."



## CHAPTER III.

WHEN they were gone, and Margaret's chair had been wheeled back to her own room, she sat for a long time with her head leaning back on the pillows. In the strong light, with the countenance uncheered by the presence of her young companions, and wanting the vivacious play of expression that came with her own thoughts and words, her face looked worn and tired, and showed plainly how much she must have suffered in the past. As she rested, the weary look died away, and when her aunt came in with her work to sit beside her, she brightened up, and told her of her morning's talk, and of their plan of work.

"It is all very lovely, my child," said her aunt, glancing rather uneasily at Margaret's pale face; "but I doubt if you have strength for all the labor it will involve. The thinking and reading and planning must all be done by you, and I often notice you are quite exhausted after these mornings with your friends."

"O, my dear auntie, I beg of you not to say a word of that to papa. I shall need his help in so many ways, as we go on."



"Yes, but we cannot let you sacrifice yourself."

"I do not mean to do that. I think I have often been tired because we girls did so little, and not because we did so much. Now, I'm only going to sit near and see a dozen of them work."

"To multiply your hands by twelve," said her aunt, smiling.

"Yes, and my feet, too. It seems to be the only way left to me."

"Well, you have enough loving-kindness and thoughtfulness in your heart to guide the labors of ever so many hands. I only fear for your strength."

"Don't fear, dear auntie, please; and don't discourage me. You know all the other ways of living and of serving are closed to me. There's nothing in my life if I cannot bring into it joy or help for others."

It was so rarely that Margaret made any allusion to her misfortune, or revealed that she missed the active joys that were denied her, that her aunt was touched. She came near, and, arranging the shawl around the invalid's shoulders, said softly as she kissed her:

"Well, to have the power to bless left, is to keep all the best of life."

"Yes, I know it," answered Margaret, lifting her eyes that were full of tears. "I know, too, that all



the joy in the life of Jesus was of just this kind that *I* may share, and I am happy and grateful; only, when the girls have come and gone, they bring so much life, that my own helpless, half-dead condition is more apparent by contrast, and I am left a little sad. But it is all passed now, and it is selfish and ungrateful, I know."

"Neither selfish nor ungrateful, but natural," said her aunt, kissing her tenderly. "I remembered you this morning, dear, when I was at the meeting of our Board of Managers of the T——r Hospital. They told me of a case of injury like yours that had been entirely cured."

"A young girl?"

"Yes, and a most beautiful girl, they said, under sixteen years of age—young, pretty, friendless, and without a home."

Margaret's reclining head was lifted, and the clear, resolute look came back to her eyes.

"Tell me more, auntie."

"Well, I do not know all about her, but she was brought to the hospital from one of the third-class theaters, where she was in training for the ballet. They were practicing one day, when a portion of the temporary stage gave way, and she had a frightful fall. The injuries were singularly similar to yours; but for two years she has been in the hos-



pital, and her vigor of constitution has conquered the weakness, and now she is going out cured."

"But not strong?"

"No, she will never be strong."

"But she will not go back to that frightful life?"

"No, she can never do that, nor can she do severe labor anywhere. We try, when cases like this occur, where there are no friends to whom the patient can return, to find work suited to the convalescent's strength; but that is sometimes very difficult."

"Naturally, people who employ labor wish a full equivalent for wages."

"Certainly. It is not easy to find homes that can also be made temporary asylums."

"Yet such poor creatures need nothing so much as a home."

"That is true. The ladies who come in contact with girls like this one, give them money, and sometimes, but rarely, make a place in their households for one to do light work, and at the same time bestow such care on her manners, morals, and health as would really start her after-life on a better plan."

"Sometimes! Why should there not be some arrangement by which it could be done often or always? Why, it must often mean the saving of a whole life!"



"True, but the mistress of a household cannot always act quite freely in such matters. There are children and servants to whom the new element may be demoralizing. There must be consideration of the welfare of all in the house, as well as of the one to come in. For example, if I felt willing to provide a home for this Crystal Niel, as she is called, she might be a very unwelcome addition to your father and to you."

"No, indeed, auntie; I am sure I should be very glad, and you know papa is always willing we should do as we think wise. Let us take her, auntie dear. You say she is young and pretty. She will keep these gray hairs of mine from coming so fast, perhaps, and there are so many things that I can do for her."

"Ah, but what can she do for you? is the question."

"Not the first question, auntie," said Margaret, softly. Then she added, her fine eyes glowing with an earnest light, "if we do it, auntie, we can ask others to do it also; and, if every lady on your Board of Managers tried to interest her circle of friends, until she had a list of all the homes she knew in which the lady would be willing to try the experiment of having one homeless girl, there could surely be found enough places for all who need them."



"Ah, my child, you have a genius for organization, I believe," said Mrs. Warren, smiling.

"No, I have no gift; but I think this could be done. You could have some one lady to keep a register of all the places that were available, with the number of weeks for which each would be willing to keep a girl. During these periods permanent places might be secured."

"And for how long, then, should we agree to keep our Crystal Neil?"

"Let us try her for a month, and keep her longer if we can."

"Very good. We will try it, if your father does not object. We will save her, if she proves worth saving."

"Jesus thought she was worth saving," passed through Margaret's mind, but she said nothing. And that same evening the matter was discussed with Mr. Heath, whose theory was to grant every wish of Margaret's, even if her wishes sometimes seemed to him the fancies of an invalid's mind.

He gave her abundant love, and he gave her also the next best thing for a good woman, a kind and trustful freedom to do what she felt right and best within the limits that his means would afford.



## CHAPTER IV.

ON a sunny morning, two days later, Margaret was seated by the window, watching for the coming of her aunt, who was to bring the stranger, Crystal Neil.

When she heard the carriage she could hardly wait for them to mount the stairs, and before the flush died from her cheeks the door opened, and her aunt came forward, leading by the hand a young and beautiful girl clad in a costume of shabby black. Before her aunt had time to say a word, Margaret had welcomed her with a smiling face and outstretched hand.

“So this is the young friend who has come to show a poor invalid how to grow well and strong?” she said. “My aunt tells me you are almost well.”

“Almost well, thank you;” and the lovely brown eyes were lifted to Margaret’s face.

“She is well enough to take care of you, Margaret, and help you in any way that you wish to have her.”

“I am glad of that, for, you see, Crystal—that is your name, is it not?—I have to borrow other people’s hands for all my work. And I need some one to help me just now. The gardener has been mak-



ing for me a few little bouquets every morning, and I told him to-day that we would make them here, if he would bring the flowers to me. So, if you like to come back, after you have seen your room and taken off your hat, we will enjoy the flowers together."

Bewildered by the kind voice and gentle eyes, bewildered by the lovely room, fragrant with flowers, and bright in the fire-light, the girl was taken away to her little room not far from Margaret's own. It was plainly but neatly furnished, and there was nothing to note, above other rooms in the servants' wing, except that a glass of roses stood on the bureau, not fresher or more beautiful than was the face that bent over them in delight, and then lifted itself and gazed long and earnestly into the mirror by her side.

She gazed like one in a dream. What had happened that she, with her fourteen horrible years of toil, of curses, of childish misery, and her two years of anguish in a hospital, should have come out at last into this home-paradise? Like one in a happy dream, she went back to Margaret, and over the bouquets the two became acquainted, and something of Crystal's timid silence wore away.

Her aunt had made it clearly understood that, since Crystal was not yet strong enough for very hard work, she was to come into the family and aid



Miss Margaret in any way that should be required, and meantime they would interest themselves to find her suitable occupation. She had listened silently, and answered "Yes," to the lady's proposition. She knew nothing of such a life as the one proposed; but she must go somewhere, being too far recovered to be allowed to linger in the hospital, and she had nowhere else in the whole wide world to go. And now she was here, in this beautiful home, with warmth and beauty all about her, and a kind voice and loving smile to greet her. No wonder that into the midst of her pleasure there crept already the startled fear of the day when work should be found elsewhere.

And Margaret was happy also in her new acquisition of youth and brightness, as a child with a new and pretty book. She looked down at the soft color on the cheeks. The rose leaves were not fairer. Not one of the girls who were her special friends, neither Ruth, Edith, Grace, nor Helen, could boast such soft bright eyes. Not even curly-headed Dot had such a wealth of sunny hair as this, that shone as she bent her head in tying up the flowers. As Margaret, with a girl's love of beauty, watched her, she wondered what her friends would think of her new possession. Her kind heart readily opened to this homeless, friendless girl, the seemingly uncon-



scious owner of the gift of beauty, a gift too often fatal to the daughters of the poor.

Before the bouquets were finished laughing voices were heard in the hall below, and three girls, Helen, Edith, and Dot, came merrily in, and half-smothering Margaret with kisses, were in turn surprised at the sight of this fair young face bending over the tray of flowers. For a moment Margaret hesitated, facing the problem that had come up in one of their talks, as to the footing on which these strangers should come among them. Only a moment, and then she said, sweetly :

“This is my new friend, Crystal Neil, girls, who has come to stay with me a few weeks, to do some of the things I cannot do for myself. She has arranged all the flowers for us this morning, and I am sure we have never had such lovely bouquets before.”

“If she could see poor Biddy Dolan’s eyes when I take her this cluster of buds,” said Helen, “she would be paid for her care. The poor little thing asked me where I got them, and I told her the queen sent them to her ; and now she is exercising her vivid Irish imagination with visions of a good Queen Meg, sitting on a throne, in the midst of fields of flowers that grow up to her very feet, and which she orders her maidens to gather for all the little children who



are ill. I haven't untangled her fancies from the facts yet."

"Her fancy is not far from the fact this time," said Edith; "poor little tot, is she no better?"

"No better, nor can be in the air she breathes in the basement of a crowded tenement house. They might have a little cot in the country somewhere, but old Biddy wont leave Barney, her husband, and Barney wont leave the drink.

And the natural result of all that is, that little Biddy must sit bolstered up in the chair, fighting with all her strength for her little share of breath," said Dot.

"The murder of the innocents!" said Margaret, sadly; "there seems to be no way of saving the children from the curse, when the parents drink."

A quick startled glance from Crystal's brown eyes shot up to Margaret's face, and Margaret read it as if it had been written in words.

"Poor child! she knows the meaning of that curse, I fear," she thought, adding aloud, "what can be done for Biddy Dolan's child?"

"Could she go into the country?" asked Edith.

"Biddy, the elder, must scrub or starve," answered Helen.

"But could she not go without her mother? Couldn't some place be found?"

"I fear not, for a feeble child needs much care.



And there is no one who could go with her, unless"—and Margaret's eyes sought Crystal's—"unless Crystal could."

And Crystal, poor child, who had just come into paradise, and wanted to stay, saw the gate just opening, and the light gleaming through the crack, that she felt would widen and widen until she should be thrust through it, out again into the bitter world. She looked frightened and excited, and in that moment little Biddy Dolan became an object of unconscious dislike and dread. And Margaret understood it all, though nobody said a word, and pitied the heart that had been so full of its own trouble, that it had no care for the pain of others. Poor Crystal! looking with her rare beauty like a veritable Cinderella, in her old faded gown, she had never yet learned to be sorry for any one but herself. She had seen too much of the misery and suffering of the poor to be disturbed over little Biddy Dolan's panting breath. And Margaret, with her quick, spiritual instinct, divined it all, with no feeling but one of desire to waken—in the heart that knew nothing of God's pitying love, nothing of motherly or sisterly tenderness—a pity for other children equally orphaned and bereft.

Nothing more was said of little Biddy, and day after day went by, and Crystal regularly performed



her morning duty of binding up the flowers, but never uttered a word as to the use to which the bouquets were to be put. She saw the girls come and go; she took great pleasure in their merry chat and laughter about Queen Margaret's chair. She was herself the most beautiful girl of them all; and, clad in the simple frocks with which Margaret had replaced the hospital gown, she went hither and thither about her tasks, cheerful and seemingly content. But when the conversation turned upon the poor, she was absolutely silent, as if for her existed no such class. In this Margaret was disappointed; for while she could understand that allusions to such poverty and degradation might be painful, she could not understand the unmoved hardness and indifference with which she listened, as the girls told their trying experiences, even in the bestowal of the flowers.

"My dear old feeble Quaker lady was taken away by her brother into the country, last week," said Ruth, one day, when they had all come in to talk with Margaret over the recipients of the flowers.

"She was a lovely old soul, not so dreadfully poor, not starvation poor, I mean. She had her room on the top floor of a decent house in C—— Street, and said she liked it up there, because she could go out on the roof in summer evenings, and get the cool air and



see the stars. And I fancy she fell ill by going up to see the stars too often when the nights were damp. Any way, she has had malarial fever, down with a chill every third day and, as it happened, my flowers went twice a week, and went on the day of the chill."

"How did you know of her?" asked Margaret.

"Through the physician who came to see Brother Will. He told mother he had been called to a nice old Quakeress, who supported herself by making boys' suits, and lived up near the sky, in two little rooms, as neat as a queen bee's waxen cell."

"And now she's gone?"

"Yes, it seems she had a brother, and the brother had a farm in Pennsylvania, among the hills, and she didn't like to tax him, knowing the farm brought in little money. But he heard of her illness, and came on and took her away to his home; so, twice a week, I can take my flowers to a new place, if any one knows of some one who is ill."

"Well, some people have a genius for doing good," said Grace. "Just hear Ruth, now! What could be lovelier than to climb up those stairs, and get the dear old lady's blessing? When Ruth told me of her sweet old lady, I told mamma I should never be satisfied till I had found an old lady, too. I had been taking my flowers to a sick boy, and his



mother said 'he liked them, but he liked something good to eat a great deal better.' So I asked mother to furnish me with goodies to make a welcome for my flowers, and she mildly remarked that it would be good practice if I made the delicacies myself, which I proceeded to do, and produced a jelly that refused to 'jell,' and some whipped cream that suddenly came to butter."

All laughed heartily, but Grace was not to be interrupted.

"You must hear me out," she said. "As I didn't know where properly to look for a suitable and suffering old woman, I asked the mother of my hungry boy, and she told me she knew of one who was always ill, or in a chronic state of 'being poorly;' so I looked her up, and she was ugly enough and untidy enough, with her lame foot ever up in a chair, to make me worthy of great credit for going near her at all."

"That's good!" broke in Dot. "There's no virtue at all in going to see dear, sweet, agreeable young ladies, eh, Ruth?"

"I hope you taught her to be tidy," suggested Edith, playfully; "that's a part of the missionary work, you know."

"Now, queenie, if you let them interrupt me so, I shall never be able to finish my report."



“Go on, dear, I am anxious to hear.”

“Well, as I told you, I found my old woman. She wasn’t a Quaker; she wasn’t sweet; she didn’t care for the stars or the summer midnight sky; but she was lame and miserable, and so I bestowed upon the dingy, stuffy room the light and bloom of Margaret’s flowers.”

“Quite poetical,” said Edith, approvingly; “go on.”

“Well, one morning I had quite a struggle with myself to go around that way when I went out. The flowers were lovely. Crystal had arranged them bewitchingly, and, if the truth must be told, girls, I wanted to keep them myself. But I resisted, and did my whole duty with those flowers.”

“And had your reward,” broke in Dot.

“And had my reward,” repeated Grace; “for as I ran down stairs there were rolled after me blessings in the name of the ‘howly Virgin,’ and all the saints. But an hour or two later I had occasion to pass that way again, and whom should I meet but Bell Finch, with a lovely cluster of roses in her belt. I looked at them in surprise. Had my roses died in disgust on the spot where I had left them, and come to life again, and found a fitting resting-place on a lady’s dainty dress? I could but stare, and Bell said, smiling, ‘Are they not lovely? I buy them three times



a week, as I pass this way in my walk, from an old woman on the corner. I don't know where she buys them, but they are always fresh, as if just cut.' I bade her good-morning without much further talk, and hastened on around the corner. Yes, there she was! my lame old woman who couldn't put her foot down to save her life, trudging smartly on to the liquor store in the next street. I waited till she emerged, with a black bottle under her tattered shawl; and when she came out I stood still, prepared to see her drop down on her lying knees, overwhelmed with remorse and shame."

"I declare this grows tragic," said Dot.

"Go on, go on!" said Margaret, whose face was earnest and sad. "What did she do?"

"Did she run?" asked Edith.

"Run! She just stopped on the sidewalk and glared at me, her face red with anger. 'Bad luck to yez, and the likes of yez,' she said; 'it's myself that's got a child iv me own a dale purtyer and a dale dacent nor yez, wid all yur durrty plants a-smellin' in dacent bodies' houses. She's lift me, she has, all alone in me ould age, and I'll have to put the dhrap iv whisky in me bones, to git the strength to be runnin' the whole world over afther her. But I'll find her yit,' said she, 'I'll find her yit, ye blackguard!'"

So dramatic was Grace's manner, and so excellent



her imitation, that the girls received the full impression of the woman's wretched degradation, and felt no inclination to laugh; and Crystal turned sharply away from the recital, and stood gazing from the window. But Margaret saw her start and shiver at the closing words; and when she turned and faced them her face was troubled and white.

"Well, dear girls, you know I said, when I gave you the flowers, that your mothers must decide as to the places where you could go. I could not help you to do any thing by which you might be exposed to disease, or come in contact with rude or vicious people, or incur the least danger of insult. Crystal here tells me that flowers are always gladly welcomed at the hospitals, and perhaps on one or two mornings in the week we had better send them there."

"Yes, dear queenie," said Ruth; "but we are very careful, going only where our mothers suggest, and not going alone anywhere, except where we know all about the home. I don't see how we are ever to be genuinely helpful among the poor, unless we do come to see how they really live."

"You can never help them!" broke in Crystal, vehemently; "it is wasting your flowers and your time and your strength to try. The curse of the poor is the drink; and you cannot stop that. All



that you try to do is like the nibbling of mice at a mountain, or fishes trying to drink all the sea." She paused, abruptly, as if suddenly conscious of her own voice, and added, with a blush, "It's very kind, but it would be of no use whatever if you went on trying till you died."

She had never ventured on one utterance of opinion before, and Margaret was as much astonished as the rest, but she said, gently,

"I am so glad to have you speak out, Crystal; but I should be sorry to feel it so hopelessly bad as you say. We can help little children, surely. They are not helplessly depraved, and they do suffer."

"Yes, yes; they suffer, as you, and girls like you, can never even guess; but you can do nothing for them, unless you can take them away. If they only stay long enough, they'll be just as hopelessly bad."

"Then the best thing is to get Biddy Dolan into the country as fast as ever we can," said Margaret, feeling that the time had come again to see if one spark of feeling had been roused in Crystal's heart; but the girl flushed and answered, vehemently,

"The best thing for Biddy Dolan, or for any of the children of the drunken poor, is to die!"

Then she turned and left the room.

"You see, girls, that we are finding out," said Margaret, "how sore and suffering life may be made for



innocent people by the drink and the sin it brings in its train. We must not give up our thought of helping or saving or healing wherever we can. We shall make mistakes, waste efforts, be tired and disheartened, but we must do good. I'm sure you all feel about it as I do, and we will all keep on trying in our own way. The flower experiment is not a failure; I do not see why it should not be ultimately a great success. If we could find only a few persons who loved the flowers enough to try to cultivate them, and we could furnish them with a plant for the window, why, even in the kitchens they must do good."

"Yes, for a plant will call for a clean spot for itself, and the owner may begin to tidy up the place to make it a fit home for the flowers," answered Grace.

"That's what I mean when I call them angels—God's messengers to flutter their petals, like wings, against the closed doors of the heart. Why, I have seen the tears come at the sight of one little flower. Of course, we must go on."

"Yes, yes," they all agreed, and parted for the day.



## CHAPTER V.

So interested had they been in all their recent meetings, in the new work that seemed opening out before them, that Margaret fancied their next art meeting would not be a success. Nevertheless, they all looked forward to it with interest, as at this time they were each to bring the friend. When the hour arrived, Margaret presented Crystal, and Ruth introduced Lucy Reed, the young girl from her mother's Sunday-school class, a very gentle and lovely young woman, notwithstanding the cashmere frock which had faded to a rusty brown. Helen Marsh came leading in a tall brunette, about fifteen years old, whose dark hair and flashing black eyes made a marked contrast to the golden locks and tender blue eyes of Crystal Neil. Her name was Bella—Bellina her mother called her, and she was the daughter of Helen's music-master. Edith had had to seek for a companion, and had found her in Clara Lee, a type-setter, sometimes employed in the same establishment which had given work to Stella White, the poor girl whose need had been the source of all their distribution of flowers.



And now they were all there but Dot, who surprised them shortly by appearing in company with the invalid herself. As mentioned, she had constantly grown stronger, but had never yet been equal to coming to sit among the flowers. Nor would she have come now, had not Dot coaxed her out into the sunshine, urging that she might make it less embarrassing for her own friend, Clara Lee. Very cordially they all welcomed her, and made for her a cushioned seat near Margaret's side.

There was a good deal of merry talk, and Margaret's aunt sent in a tray with biscuits and chocolate, over which the old members of the class became acquainted with the new; and, by the time the lesson began, the shyness of the latter had in a measure worn away.

Then Margaret told them briefly of the pleasant talks on various subjects which she had enjoyed when they were only "half a dozen," and of their wish to enlarge the circle of their pleasure by inviting others to share it. She told them she thought they could be mutually helpful, by dividing the labor, so that each should contribute her share.

She then proceeded to illustrate their method for the new friends, by calling upon the old for the results of their examination of the subject in hand. Grace Merrill produced a brief historical sketch of



the principal events transpiring in his own and other countries in the time of Leonardo da Vinci. Edith Grant offered a few biographical facts concerning the eminent men who were his contemporaries. Ruth had tried to make a short outline of the condition of the arts, and especially of the art of painting at the period of Leonardo's life; and Dorothy Hall, who had persuaded her father to discuss the matter with her, had some thoughts to offer on the source and power of the religious sentiment in art.

Then followed general questions and statements concerning the artist's character, education, and work. His time, his social surroundings, the character and the court of the great French monarch who was his patron, all came in for their share of the morning's talk.

And thus delightfully the stream of conversation flowed, until they came to the study of his pictures, as represented by Margaret's engravings and photographs; and then to the consideration of his great masterpiece, the Cenecola, or Last Supper, painted on the wall of the refectory in an old convent at Milan.

By this time I need not say all were greatly interested, and they made a lovely group as they gathered around the table on which the prints were spread, and studied the varying expression of the faces of



the apostles, and gradually centered their attention, as Margaret meant they should, upon the face of Christ. Then she told them of the time when she saw all that remains of the painting; of its present fast fading condition; of the copies from which her prints were made; of the discovery of the original drawings of all the heads, except that of Christ. All these are things which, if our younger readers do not know, they will find pleasure in looking up for themselves; or, perhaps several of them together will enjoy searching among books or asking parents and teachers to tell them the facts brought out by the study of these girls. To tell all these things by detailing all their conversations would take too much of our space, as well as rob you of the chief delight in knowledge, which is not knowing, but seeking to know. I must not, however, forget to add one thing that Margaret never forgot in her lovely work among her young friends. When they came to contemplate the pictured face of Christ, she ceased to draw the others out, and told them how many years Leonardo studied over that head; how his conception of Christ's character seemed to grow with every sketch, until he felt it impossible ever to embody his ideal, and often abandoned the hope. Yet, whether he gave himself up to science, or to the brilliant social life that awaited him, this one face haunted him, till



at last it found its way to the canvas, and became the world's finest pictured type of the love and power of Christ. She talked a little of him as the one character worthy of a life-time's study, of the blessedness of such a knowledge as made the life a careful following of him. She dwelt upon his beauty, and the talk ended with this :

“I like to study his pictured face, girls ; and I have seen nearly every celebrated representation of him on canvas or in marble ; but I think there is a way in which every one, even girls like ourselves, may be artists, and may reproduce in ourselves, and those about us, real and living images of Christ. And that higher art is the one we want to study most. Leonardo lived to show the world the loveliness of Christ. But all the love and all the goodness in the world is a part of himself ; and so we can be helping to reveal him whenever we help any human being to be good or can be so ourselves. When we go with our flowers among the sick ; when we share our good things with others ; when we help little children to be happy ; we increase the goodness and the love in human lives, and are thus showing Christ to the world, as truly as the great artist did. I did not mean to make it a Sunday-school lessson,” she added, smiling, as she gathered up the prints ; “but we are all so young, and we are all pleased with the idea of



an artist's career. Let us be artists, indeed, reproducing every-where the image of him who went about doing good."

"What subject shall we take next, Queen Madge?" asked Dot, breaking in upon the gentle hush that followed Margaret's closing words.

"Could we not have the same topic once more?" added Edith. "I feel as if I was just ready to begin to study the picture, after all we have heard to-day."

"And I just begin to see how little I know about it," said Ruth.

"Very well, then. Suppose you girls that have studied one aspect of the subject, exchange with others; for example, you, Edith, who gave us the biography, change with Grace, who had the history, and these who have had access to books find and loan a book to those new friends who have not yet begun to work."

And then they broke up into pleasant chatty groups, and all talked at once, as girls will, and the faces of the strangers grew bright, as they came to feel thoroughly at home. When they separated, Margaret went to her room with a happier heart than she had known for a long, long time.

"I feel as if we had really begun, auntie dear," she said. And her aunt spread a light shawl over her, as she lay on the sofa. "We are, at last, in close and



real contact with at least six persons, whose lives we can uplift and help ; and, if we count some one soul in each home to which the flowers go, we have at least six more."

"Well, if you are each reaching two lives with the touch of kindness, your life-work is truly begun. Now, the problem is to make the good you mean to do really a good in their lives."

"And I suppose," said Margaret, gently, "that the surest way is to stimulate others to use their own powers, rather than to remove the need."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Warren, earnestly ; "the true principle of helpfulness, whether for body, mind, or soul, is to help others to help themselves. That is our problem. Just in proportion that we do this, we truly help."

"That's a good motto for us, then, auntie. I will propose it to the girls. 'Help others to help themselves, and every thing that tends to that we may properly try!'"

"Yes, and every thing that diminishes the impression in any mind that its progress depends on any thing but itself, weakens and perverts. We can arouse desire for improvement, and supply the opportunity, but we must not do for others any thing that, by the exercise of their own faculties, they could do for themselves."



“And that applies to things done for outward comfort, as well as inward growth, I suppose?” asked Margaret.

“Yes, my dear. It would be of little use for your flower girls, for example, to spend the time every morning in the homes to which they take the flowers, in making the room and the bed and the invalid tidy and comfortable; but to do just enough to show them the better way; and then, to teach them, little by little, to make themselves cleaner and more comfortable, would be a wonderful work. But I must leave you to rest now, dear child. You have had quite talk enough for one morning;” and her aunt kissed the pale face, and left her to repose.

Not many days later Mrs. Warren returned from a visit to the hospital, and sought Margaret in her room.

“I have been going through the wards of the convalescents this morning; and, as I saw one pale face after another beginning to brighten with the hue of health, I remembered Crystal and our little talk about providing homes and work for the young women on their discharge.”

“Are there many young women among the convalescents, auntie?”

Yes, at least twenty, who will be sent away within a month.”

“And how many of these have homes?”



"Very few, I fear; but I have not yet inquired."

Margaret looked thoughtful awhile; then, suddenly, her face brightened, and she clasped her hands together with sudden enthusiasm.

"Dear auntie, do you not think we might begin now, at once, and do something for these young girls who have no homes?"

"What can we do at once?"

"Is the hospital not a proper place for some of our girls, our half-dozen, I mean to visit?"

"Certainly, my child, every thing is clean, and tidy, and quite safe."

"There is no danger of contagion?"

"Not at all. The convalescents are quite separated from any such danger; and, indeed, it is not a hospital for such diseases. Contagious cases are not brought to us, if the disease is defined."

"Then, why should not our girls go there and become acquainted with the convalescents, and so become interested in them?"

"And then return and tell you all about them, and see if you can devise some plan of help?"

"Yes, dear, auntie; it will do us as much good as it will the patients. We don't know any thing, practically, about suffering."

"I think you do, my darling," said Mrs. Warren, bending to kiss Margaret's cheek.



“Yes, I know a little; enough, thank God, to make me care for the suffering of others.”

“Well, I like your plan, dear auntie. Perhaps, if you young girls become interested, the ladies may be induced to help you carry out your idea.”

“When can we begin, auntie?”

“Well, every week some of the ladies visit the wards. My next visiting day comes on Friday. On Wednesday your class comes together.”

“And I will tell them of this plan, and see if we get volunteers,” said Margaret.

“If you do, I will take the girls with me on Friday, and they can come to you afterward with their report.”

And the girls came as usual, with their bright fresh faces and happy hearts; and, after the lesson, Margaret talked to them of the theme that was uppermost in her mind. She had hoped that Crystal would be among the volunteers; but she seemed to be the only one who did not meet the proposition with enthusiasm. She sat in silence, with compressed lips and an air of pained reserve, while Margaret went over the plan. It ended in three of the girls deciding to go with Mrs. Warren, on her next visit to the convalescents' ward; and three others were to go the following week, with the lady whose visits alternated with those of Mrs. Warren. In each



group of three was one of the new members, Lucy Reed and one other deciding to go with Ruth, and Bella, on the following week, was to go with Helen Marsh.

On Friday morning they gathered at Mrs. Warren's, eager and happy, as if the errand promised a new pleasure. Crystal had busied herself with arranging many tiny bouquets, but had uttered not one word as to their disposition. An hour later, they were passing, with Mrs. Warren, from couch to couch, in the long corridor, fast recovering from any timidity at the strange sight, and were met everywhere with brightened eyes and looks of gratification.

They made a picture fair enough to gladden the tired eyes of invalids weary with longing for a sight of the green fields and the blue sky. Ruth's sweet, loving face passed smilingly from one bed to another, while Lucy Reed's gentle voice lingered in quiet talk in the ear of more than one weary woman.

At the last moment the girl who was to accompany Ruth was detained, and Bella, the Italian, took her place. Standing by one of the beds with Mrs. Warren, the patient, a woman of about twenty-six years, lifted her dark eyes gratefully to her face.

"This woman is Italian, Bella," said Mrs. Warren, "and I thought she might be glad to see some one from her own land."



Quick as thought, in the warm kindness of her southern nature, Bella laid her hand upon the thin one that rested on the coverlet, and stooped and kissed the pale brow. Tears gushed from the sick woman's eyes, while Bella soothed her by gentle talk in their own tongue. Soon she knew the woman's history. Herself the daughter of a musician, Bellina knew how to sympathize with this poor creature who had come to this country after the death of her husband, believing her voice would create welcome and home. And for a time it had done both, and she had been able to support herself and her little boy. But the chill of the first northern winter proved too severe for her, and the voice, which was her only chance of support, seemed broken and gone. Severe illness set in. She had grown poorer and poorer in her solitary room; had become delirious with fever, and when the neighbors found her there, and she was removed to the hospital, her boy was left to the care of a kind woman in the same house, who took her little Guido in to share her scanty fare of "praties," with her own Hibernian lads. All this was poured rapidly, in her own beautiful tongue, into the ear of Bellina, who, finding her agitation was growing beyond her control, promised to go and see her little boy; and then said, gently,

"Now, be quiet, *amica mia*, or Mrs. Warren will



not allow me to come again. Rest now, and I will go and see your Guido, and perhaps I can bring him to see you, if you are strong enough to bear it."

And then, hushing her sobs, the poor thing murmured,

"Ah! it has given me life to hear once more my own language. I feared never to hear it again; that I should never sing, nor hear any one sing, nor even speak home words again."

"Try to rest, now, and I will sing a little song of our own land to you," said Bella.

And she lay back quietly, while the sweet voice stole soothingly out upon the hushed air of the room. Closed eyes opened, as if the poor souls had been taken suddenly from the white walls to the sight of green fields, and the song of summer birds. Bowed heads were lifted, and the listless, weary look passed from many a face. She sang Italian songs, soft and low; she sang again, in English, hymns that they all knew, and pleasant home strains that went to the hearts, and brightened the eyes, and cheered and rested the weary souls. And when, at the end of the hour, Mrs. Warren took the girls away, she no longer questioned whether the visitors were too young to enter upon their work of comforting the suffering world.



## CHAPTER VI.

ONE week later three other girls made their visit to the convalescent ward of the hospital, laden, as before, with dainty clusters of flowers. This time there was no singing, but Dorothy, who was an intelligent reader, read aloud some cheerful and humorous selections, which brought smiles to the faces of the invalids, and left an atmosphere of cheerfulness about the place. Bellina's new friend scanned the young faces eagerly, but Mrs. Warren sent her a kind message by Dot, who assured her that Bellina should visit her on the following day.

On Saturday morning, therefore, Bella came to Mrs. Warren, leading by the hand a lovely boy, of five years of age, with the soft dark eyes and olive cheeks of his mother.

Mrs. Warren had talked with Margaret of the propriety of allowing Bella to go by herself into the tenement-house quarter, where the poor mother had left her boy. And Margaret had told her aunt that one part of her plan was to acquaint her girls with the actualities of the homes of the poor.

Just how to do this, and, at the same time, to make



sure of thorough protection, was one of the problems not yet settled, and that could only be decided by the results of experiment.

After some discussion, Mrs. Warren said :

“Well, in this instance, I will go first alone. Then, if it is not suitable for Bellina to go by herself, I will go again with her. If it is well for her to go, I will say nothing of having preceded her, for I want to make this a work of the girls themselves, in so far as that can be done.”

“You are so wise, auntie dear,” said Margaret. “It is better for them to feel that the new work is their own, and that their own faculties must devise methods and execute plans. Am I right in thinking it important that they should know the poor as they are?”

“Certainly, my child : to know a few things about the poor is not sufficient. To be really helpful, there must be real knowledge of people and conditions as they are, not as they are supposed to be, or as they ought to be.”

“I have thought perhaps the girls might go in pairs. Two would be safe and useful where one might fail.”

Nevertheless, for this time, Bellina went alone, and came back triumphant, bringing with her the beautiful, but ragged, boy.



Margaret's eyes grew soft and tender, as she drew the little fellow to her side, and parted the curls from his brow.

"So you are going to see mamma, are you?" she asked. "Well, we must send you clean to her. Here, Crystal, will you go out and find a little suit of fresh, plain clothes; and come back and give him a bath and bring him to me, when he is ready?"

While Crystal was gone, Margaret asked Bellina to stay and help her prepare the flowers to be taken to the sick. And she improved the opportunity to become acquainted with her, and to draw out her views as to what could be done for her countrywoman.

"I was so glad to find you had such a beautiful gift to offer the sufferers. My aunt told me how they were gladdened and cheered by your voice."

"I am very happy, I am sure, if I gave any pleasure. I felt very timid about trying; but the poor woman's eyes seemed so hungry for something, and I thought the music would soothe her."

"It was a lovely thing to do; and if I had a voice like yours, I should be only too glad to use it to bless the weary and disheartened. I used to sing a little when a young girl; but, for many years, I have not been able to go out to hear music."

"Perhaps—perhaps," said Bella, timidly, "I could sing sometimes for you."



"It would make me very happy," answered Margaret; "and I will ask you to sing for us all sometimes. Do you suppose you could sing with us, and train our voices, so that we could sing together?"

"I might. Father intends me to teach, and I could at least try."

"And, meantime, would you be willing to join the other girls, if we form a little plan of visiting the hospital weekly? There are other hospitals, homes, and asylums for sick women and children, where a little music would be a great delight."

"What a lovely work it would be, if one only had time to visit them all, and sing to the patients!"

"Well, perhaps, by and by, when we are regularly organized as a band of workers, we can manage a visit to some of them, at least once a month, if we can make a band of half a dozen, who will either sing or read; it would not be severe for any. Perhaps Guido's mother may help."

"Yes, if her voice is not hopelessly gone."

"Ah! I hope not. What do you think is the best thing we can do for her, Bella?"

"Just for the present, nothing. She is not to leave the hospital for some weeks yet."

"Have you talked with your father, Bella?"

"Yes, and he says he will try to help her to pupils;



and, if her voice is unimpaired, to secure an opportunity for her to sing in church."

"But what shall we do for a home for her meantime?"

"Mother says, if ours will serve, she will take her in until she gets upon her feet."

"Ah! that is indeed lovely," said Margaret. "Tell your mother she is the pioneer in this hospital work."

"How so?" asked Bella.

"Why, we are anxious to find homes that will admit the convalescents until they are strong and work is secured, and your mother is the first that has offered."

Just here Crystal returned with the beautiful boy, bathed and combed, and clad in a fresh suit, holding up his rosy mouth to Margaret for a kiss. She snuggled him closely for a moment, and, filling his hands with roses, sent him away to his mamma.

Bella took the basket of flowers to the bedside of the mother; and, after such a time of delight as went further than medicine to effect her recovery, the little man was sent with the tiny bouquets from bed to bed. Half-roguishly, half-timidly, he approached with his little treasure, welcomed every-where with eager, smiling glances; and then, before the outstretched hands could grasp him, darted back to his mother's side.



No better physician ever appeared in any convalescent's ward than this little radiant-faced boy. People who had long ago forgotten their childhood; mothers whose little ones had been hidden away in the neglected graves of the poor-lot; or whose children were waiting in wretched homes for mother to get well, all followed the little prattler with eager eyes. And when Bella coaxed him from his mother's arms, and took him away, he left behind him a blessing, such as was not always left even by the Sunday sermon or psalm. And one rebellious old woman, bowed with chronic rheumatism, muttered, as she passed:

"A body might even read a tract, if they sent that little chap with it."

When the girls made their report at the next meeting, it proved that there were five young women, besides Guido's mother, in the hospital, who would soon be in need of a home and work. All the other convalescents were, for the moment, those who would return to their own families or situations.

Margaret talked freely of her hope that homes might be found for these, until work could be procured, and told them of the kindness of Bella's mother in offering to take the poor Italian woman in.

"I hardly see how we young girls can find places,"



said Ruth ; " but our mothers could help us, perhaps."

" Suppose we each take one girl to provide for," said Edith.

" Yes, that is my thought," answered Margaret. " Let each of the six interest herself in her visits to the hospital in some one girl. Learn all about her that she is willing to tell, and all that you can judge without her telling. Ascertain what she has been accustomed to do, and what are her capacities, and to what special work she is adapted."

" Then we should be able to find work for them, perhaps," said Dot, eagerly.

" Yes," answered Grace ; " if not in the field in which they have toiled before, possibly in a better one. The best thing about our each taking one is, that each girl will then feel she goes out with a friend, with some one to be interested in her career."

" And what an incalculable blessing such a friend may be !" said Margaret. " Think of it. You go to a girl when she is feeble and lonely ; you show her that you care about her welfare ; you are willing to work for her ; you help her to find occupation ; you are still her friend. You learn about her leisure ; you suggest a pleasant way to pass an hour ; help her to a nice book, or even a walk, or a little pleasure, such as girls like you can always easily provide. By



and by you find out if she goes to church and the Sunday-school, and what company she keeps. Ah! you smile, my dear girls, but you will not need to watch to find out most of this—she will tell you, if you give her a chance; she will open her heart, if you are not too occupied with yourselves to listen. You can help, you can guide. If you find her head from very emptiness turns to pleasures she should not have, give a fragment of your time to teaching her something she does not know: how to keep accounts; how to cut out garments; how to make a flower grow in her window. Any thing that you do yourself she will be glad to learn.”

“Ah, Madge! Queen Madge! what an inspiration you are! I want to go straight to the hospital this afternoon and seize my girl,” said Edith, whose enthusiasm had filled her eyes with tears.

All laughed, and Margaret went on, quietly:

“Well, the sooner you each go, the better. If six of us act as a committee to see the girls and find them work, then the other six can be a committee to find homes for those not strong enough for service. And just now we want five homes.

So the girls divided themselves into pairs, two for each convalescent, and on the morrow proceeded to their work. Mrs. Warren promised to mention their plan to the Board of Managers, and the result was an



offer of two places at once. The other four places were found by the girls interested, by inquiry among their own and their mothers' friends for places where half a girl's time should be considered an equivalent for her care. The other half should be given to rest and recuperation, and such preparation in wardrobe and other particulars as should be needed for her new place. Fortunately they had not much difficulty with the first half-dozen girls; finding places almost at once, and more than were needed; for ladies responded with great kindness as soon as the object of the work was thoroughly understood. A register was opened, in which the extra places were entered, and this was put in charge of Ruth, and each girl pledged herself to mention the matter in her circle of friends, and to bring addresses of those homes which would receive a girl. This, with the length of time which one might be permitted to stay, were recorded in Ruth's little book, and it was soon decided to keep a record, also, of each convalescent's name, age, former occupation, and residence, that the all-important items concerning her that would enable the little band to follow her with help and comfort and cheer might be preserved.

Having arranged the whole matter, they felt quite as if they had begun to work. To Ruth, the one of their number who was a governess, they gave the



duty of asking the families that employed her to let her know whenever their friends needed nurses, or nursery governesses, in their homes. To Clara Lee they gave the task of securing a list of the printing establishments where women were employed. Margaret's father, also, promised to put her in communication with a number of manufacturing industries which employed girls. It seemed to him rather an impracticable scheme; but he would spare no pains to do what his precious, suffering child desired. He knew the faithful working of her patient heart; and, if he could bring it about, that a note from her, saying that she knew another woman to be faithful, earnest, and competent, should open the doors of honest labor, he was more than glad.

They sent to the box and card makers, to the confectioners, to the paper and envelope makers, to the unusual as well as the more distinctly womanly industries, a little note concerning this band of girls, bound together to help and succor other girls. And the result was, as he hoped, a friendly recognition of the effort—an expression of pleasure at being able to secure employees who were known and approved, and a promise of co-operation and help.

Soon some of the manufacturers, after having employed one or more girls who came with Margaret's card, began to send to her whenever vacancies



occurred, and the new organization thus promised to be a source of real comfort and help.

The girls were enthusiastic, each ready to be detailed in turn for visiting the bedsides of the sick. They began to look in books and periodicals for brief, entertaining items, which they brought to Margaret, in whose hands the collection grew, and was assorted; so they soon had something for almost every need. Grave or gay, tender or spirited, the girls could always find something for every bedside in the large envelopes kept in their own pigeon-hole in Margaret's desk. Then, as time passed on, they began to sing together, under the training of Bella and the poor Italian mother, who entered gratefully into the work. Such songs as she and Bella sang together she taught the others, so that out of the twelve who now formed the class in art study, they were able to form three quartettes, who sang occasionally in the women's hospitals, and the nurseries for sick children. Two by two they still carried flowers, and little by little they became familiar with many families of the deserving poor.



## CHAPTER VII.

"WHAT is the use of visiting, if we talk only a few minutes and leave a tract?" asked impetuous Dot, one day, as they were opening their budgets of experience to Margaret.

They were all around her table, and she was gathering, from the accounts of each, impressions as to the amount of real good they were able to do.

"Why, my dear Miss Hall," said Clara Lee, quickly, "to see a face like yours is a blessing to the very poor. You don't know how they, the women and children, especially, feel it that any one cares enough to come."

"Not always," said Helen; "I have called at places where it seemed to me they felt it a condescension or an impertinence."

"Well, ordinary visiting is too frequently one or the other," answered Margaret; "but we do not wish ours to be either."

"But, how in the world can we do people good, who are slovenly and untidy, who live little better than the pigs, and do not seem to mind it?" asked Edith.



“Somebody can be made to mind,” answered Margaret. “If the mother is untidy, we can teach the children better.”

“So we can,” answered Grace; “and in my families I have tried it. I found, down in B. street, a mother ill; the family in two rooms, every thing in disorder—a most discouraging prospect.”

“Well, we all find things that way. Now what did you do?”

“I only carried my flowers the first day, and spoke a few words to the poor woman, and came away. There was a girl of thirteen there, and she said to me, as I left, ‘The flowers are lovely, miss;’ and I answered, ‘Yes, but they want a nice, clean little place all to themselves. Couldn’t you take away the plate with your mother’s breakfast, and the pipe and the ashes from the table, and make it nice and clean; and wash the mug out nicely, and see how much sweeter the flowers will be?’ Well, the next day I went again, and took a glass of mother’s jelly to the woman. The table had been scoured white, and the mug replaced by a glass which shone; and the child watched me timidly, to see if I noticed it.”

“Of course you did?”

“Certainly, I told her how nice it seemed to me to see it sweet and clean, and asked her if I should show her how to make the whole room so. And I taught



her how to moisten her broom and get the dust, without raising a cloud around the bed ; and I bought her a dust-brush to be all her own, and she drove a nail to hang it on ; and, day by day, a little change was made, until now the rooms are as sweet as the scrubbing of a girl of that age can make them. And the mother lies there in wondering content. She never dreamed her poor place could be so nice ; and the child told me that when her father saw the white floor, he went to the window to knock the ashes from his pipe."

"And did you not do any of these things for her ?"

"Not at all. I only taught her how they should be done, and showed her a little each day. The trouble was that the poor child did not know how to do any thing, not even the smallest thing, well."

"In the time in which you were teaching her, could you have taught a half-dozen girls to do the same things ?" asked Margaret.

"Why, yes, if there had been space enough, and rooms dirty enough, and brooms and scrubbing-brushes enough ; and, last, but not least, girls enough."

"Ought not the mothers to teach them all this, Queen Margaret ?"

"Yes ; but who is to teach the mothers ? If



we could train the young girls coming up in these wretched homes to do the common household work well, the children would then become the teachers."

"But how could that be done?" asked Grace. "We cannot go from house to house teaching these things."

"No; but could we not bring half a dozen girls together, and teach them? Let us see how large a class we could gather, between nine and fourteen years of age, from the families where we already visit?"

At once they could name eight; and Clara, who knew many humble homes besides her own, readily promised to find four more.

"And now, girls, who will volunteer as teachers?"

And one after another responded, some playfully, some as if very uncertain of their own powers, until every member of the art class, except those who were too feeble, had promised to do her best.

"This is the life-class, I suppose," said Dot; "we seem to be trying every form of art study."

"Yes, 'our life-class' is not a bad name for this experiment," said Margaret. "We have now our girls and our teachers; but no work that needs to be done, and no place to teach them in. What shall we do?"



“Could we make a regular kitchen garden, and buy full sets of toy kitchen utensils?” asked Edith.

“Hardly that. That would be well, if we could afford it; but we want to reach an older class than the kitchen gardeners; and we want the real work for real workers.”

“If only each one of the girls’ mothers would give us her home for one day in the week, and let us go with a band of girls and actually have the work done under the teacher’s eye, we should, after we had them trained, be able to show at least a dozen model homes.”

“No, we could not hope for that. Slovenly human nature would never submit to being overlooked and set to rights by a throng of young creatures armed with dusters and brooms.”

“Could we have them once a week in our own homes?”

“Not easily, I fancy,” said Helen, before whose mind arose a visit of the astonishment of her family, and of the servants in particular, should she invade the kitchen some fine morning at the head of an army of girls.

“Neither of those plans will work, I fear,” said Margaret; “though occasionally they might be made to serve some special purpose. For example, I would be quite willing that two of them should come and



take care of my rooms, and sweep, dust, make beds, arrange the drawers, etc. Auntie would let them be taught to wash dishes, lay tables, and clean silver; but we could only try something of that sort occasionally. It would not do to make any plan depending upon private homes."

"Do you remember, Miss Margaret," said Stella White, "the asylum for little children, where my little brothers were placed? There, the older children perform nearly all the household work."

Suddenly a picture flashed across Margaret's mind, a thought that had been wandering vaguely in her brain took definiteness and shape, and she spoke it out at once.

"My dear girls," she said, eagerly, her face aglow with pleasure, "once, some time ago, I told my father I wished I could open a *crèche*, where poor children of working mothers could be cared for during the day, and have a little kindergarten teaching, as they were old enough for it, and he said: 'Well, my child, when you are ready, I will give you the unoccupied cottage on F. Street.' He thought I was joking, but I will talk to him at once. If I can get the place, we will have an orphan asylum of our own, and a *crèche*, and a kindergarten; and, in the care of this house, we can have abundant opportunity to teach our girls. If papa will give me the cot-



tage, you will all help me to furnish it, will you not ? ”

“Indeed, we will, dear Madge ; and it is like all your plans, the very best of all.”

When Margaret brought the project before her father, he made, as usual, but one objection, and that on the ground that his dear suffering daughter was taking upon herself a new responsibility, and a care beyond her strength.

“I assure you, I will not do the work, papa ; nine or ten other girls stand ready to help me with their whole hearts. Their hands will labor, their feet will run to do any thing I need. Only let us have the house, and I will promise to be better for it, instead of worse. I am happy in these things, papa ; and in forgetting my own pain, I think I grow strong much faster than if I sat here and thought only of myself.”

And her father kissed her, and told her to have it as she would ; he could not deny her.

This point gained, she held counsel with her aunt, and afterward with her young allies and friends. All decided that, if possible, the children to be taught should begin at once.

Two girls were appointed to canvass, among the families already known, for girls who could come punctually to this house twice a week. It had been left in fair condition ; nevertheless, when the twelve



girls were chosen, it was thought best to let their first lessons come in arranging it for occupancy. It was only a cottage, standing a little back from the street, in a locality where brown-stone houses had crept up to its yard on either side. Some time, as Mr. Heath knew, the house would have to be removed, to make room for a finer dwelling. At present its rental was injured by its more attractive neighbors, and he was quite willing to abandon it to his daughter's use. Mrs. Reed, the mother of Lucy, who had been brought to the band by Ruth Nelson, and who was by this time well known to Margaret, was offered a home therein, to take charge of the house, and be a mother to whatever inmates might ultimately find a refuge there.

And here, one bright morning, came a band of a dozen girls, with enough of Margaret's corps to act as teachers; and for three hours, under guidance, they swept, and dusted, and scoured; after which they were furnished with dinner and sent home, each with a trifling sum of money, the first she had ever earned in her life.

A few days later the same girls were gathered at Margaret's house, where she explained to them that her object was not to hire unskilled labor, but to teach one dozen girls at a time how to perform well all the common household tasks.



She said she would, at present, take them twice a week. Further on, she might like them an hour or two a day. The work was not to take them in their school hours. They would never be kept over two hours at any one time; their dinner would be given them at first; and the materials for their working frocks and aprons furnished, and they would be taught to make them themselves. As soon as they were able to take places as servants, places would be secured, if they wished them; and as soon as they were able to perform any one class of duties perfectly, as many as were needed could be employed at the Home at a fair rate per hour.

She bade them tell their parents all about it, and then to join the class, or not, as they and their parents should decide; and, in case they came, they were, with their parents' permission, to practice in their homes each separate industry they learned in the Training School. Then a lunch was given them, and Bella and some of the others sang for them; and they were taken into the conservatory, and thence sent home, each with a few flowers, and happy enough in the prospect of belonging to the "beautiful lady's school."

Naturally, some of the mothers were stupid, and did not understand; some were unwilling, and felt their own untidiness rebuked; some were ill-tem



pered, and jealous of any effort to improve their condition; and a few fancied it was only a new way by which the rich should get their work for nothing from the children of the poor; but there were, notwithstanding all this, more children eager to be taught than this unique life-class could accommodate.



## CHAPTER VIII.

To put the "Children's Home" in order proved no trifling task for our young workers. Furnishing was an item of much consideration, and one for which they disliked to make general appeal to the charitable. Its current expenses, even if the number of children intrusted to them was small, would not be trifling. Its matron, Mrs. Reed, was glad to give her supervision for her home. Lucy, her daughter, was to be her assistant, to keep the accounts, and to begin at once to qualify herself as a teacher of the kindergarten; and every girl of the art class was to hold herself in readiness to serve as instructress in domestic matters, one day in every two weeks.

What commotion this prospect made in some of the young ladies' homes, was known only to themselves; but girls sought the kitchens who had not felt it important before. Books on household economy were read, and the young ladies suddenly woke to the fact that nothing less than accurate and practical knowledge on their own part could be made to serve their purpose. Very amusing reports were brought to Margaret, concerning their various experiments



and failures, at the times when they came together to compare and consult. And the delightful good-nature and energy in behalf of their undertaking, which laughed at difficulties and cared for no fatigues, balanced many errors in judgment, and proved to Mrs. Warren's older mind the wisdom of enlisting the young in practical efforts for the general good.

The very absence of the pressing cares of maturer life leaves an unspent vigor and force of feeling to be expended upon any work that calls it out. This very exuberance of energy promised to meet all difficulties but one, and that the important one of financial support. This, Margaret laid before her father and her aunt, asking the former if it would not be proper for her to use, for the first year's expenditure, a portion of the small private fortune left her by her mother.

"I shall never need it all for myself, dear papa, for my life does not promise to be a long one, and calls for little use of money beyond what is needed for the home comforts, which you are so ready to provide.

"Still, we never know the needs of the future, my child."

"But ought I to hoard money for possible future needs, when others are in want of it now?"

"Well, that is a great question, my daughter, one



that has troubled older brains and tougher consciences than yours. Fortunately, it is not necessary for you to answer it. You can, if you wish, divert funds sufficient for this first year, without any danger to your own support."

"Then let me do it, please, papa! I always thought people should be their own executors."

"That depends upon how wise they are in the disposition of their goods," answered her father, playfully touching her cheek.

This point settled, all promised well for the Home. They furnished only as fast as rooms were needed. They opened with only two children—Guido, and the poor little asthmatic Biddy Dolan. Until it should fill with children, they announced that they would receive young, homeless working-girls to board, thus saving them from seeking homes in third-rate boarding houses, where they must meet, at table and elsewhere, rude and often unprincipled men.

Margaret had had frank talks with the half-dozen girls of her class, who knew the trials and temptations to which the homeless young women are exposed, and had come to the conclusion that the one great need of such girls was plain, comfortable, protected homes; she was, therefore, secretly glad when Mrs. Reed asked her if a portion of the expense could



not be met in this way, until the little children should crowd the older ones out. And she was troubled enough, when, in answer to her announcement that "a limited number of homeless girls could be cared for in a quiet house," the requests for places poured in upon her, until six houses of the capacity of this one would not have held them all. She took this pile of applications, badly spelled some of them, badly written many, but all breathing the one desire for a home, and all sending, as requested, the occupation, employer's address, present residence, and a reference. Her heart sank within her at the thought of sixty in a day answering an advertisement like that. She read some of them out to her companions.

"I am earning," says one, "six dollars a week by tinting photographs. I pay four dollars for my board, and fifty cents for my washing. I send a dollar a week to my mother in the country. I have done this for four years, and, in that time, have tried many boarding-houses, never being able to pay more than the four dollars a week. And I have never found one in which I had a thoroughly clean room, or clean wholesome food; and I might add, I have never found one where I did not have to meet people whom it did not profit one to know."

"And this is only one of sixty," she said; "and not by any means the most touching. And we have



in New York city alone, thousands upon thousands of these working women."

"Is it possible?" they asked, in astonishment.

"Yes, and when we deduct all who live in their own homes, all the married women, all those finding homes with friends, we have still left a startling number who must resort to boarding."

"Well, our three or four little rooms will not tell much upon the destiny of so many," said Helen.

"Certainly not; but we must do what we can. Lucy, will you answer six of these sixty letters, and invite the writers to come to us."

"Which six, Miss Margaret?"

"Those who have been longest at the boarding-houses," said Alice.

"We will leave that to a committee of Clara, Lucy, and Stella," continued Margaret. "These three know something of the boarding-house life, and can judge as we cannot."

"Shall we keep the other letters?" asked Lucy.

"No, but make a new heading in our register, so that it shall not only include girls who want work, and employers who want workers, but working-girls who want homes. When we have settled one or two other points, we will turn to this subject again. At present we must decide about fitting the room for the girls."



"Four rooms are ready, so far as the bare furniture is concerned," said Lucy.

"Yes," answered Grace, who was on the House Committee; "but there are neither sheets, pillow-slips, curtains, nor towels."

"Well, girls, what shall we do about these?" asked Margaret, who more and more was trying to induce the girls to do their own thinking. They were silent a moment, and then Edith answered:

"I hoped we would have many of these things made while teaching our girls to sew, but we cannot wait for that."

"When I was talking to one of the girls' mothers about our plan," said Helen, "she told me that many women would be glad of the chance we were giving these children, to work by the hour, for some slight payment."

"Do you think we could find a half-dozen who would like the employment?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, indeed!" spoke up several voices at once.

"Could they come in the afternoon and sew at the Home?" asked Lucy.

"Yes, if they would not interfere with the training classes. Lucy knows about that."

"No, there is room enough for both," said Lucy.

"Very well, then. Look up the six women who would like to earn an honest penny by sewing in



their hours of leisure, and bring them together the first possible day. Your mother will buy the materials, Lucy, and have them all ready, there."

"But it will take them some time, Queen Madge," said Dot. "I think we could each ask our own mothers to give a pair of sheets, and towels—say enough for one room."

"Well, we need only four sets," said Grace; "I know mother will give me one."

"And I'll bring one," said Helen.

"And I," added Edith.

"Well, that will meet the need," said Margaret, quickly, anxious that nothing should seem to be asked of those girls less able to give; "but our plan is not to beg," she said; "though, we shall not refuse donations from our friends. My aunt has kindly placed at our service a set of plain china from her country house, where she never lives, since she changed her home to ours. But this is our work, and we want to devise our ways out of its inevitable problems. We don't wish the good to be retarded by our inabilities, neither do we wish things made so easy for us, that others grapple with its difficulties, and not we ourselves."

"What are we to call the Home, Queen Margaret?" asked Bella. "It surely ought to have a name."



"It should be called—Queen Madge's Rest," said Dot, quickly.

"O, no!" said Margaret, "that is only our own little name just for ourselves alone. I should not like to have it go out to the world; and, besides, it is my father gives us the use of the Home."

"Suppose we call it the Heath Asylum?" said Grace.

"Yes, let us name it after him," said Alice.

"I don't think it should have a name," answered Margaret; "that marks it as an institution. We do not mean to support a charity, but to create a help toward making people self-supporting."

"Might it not be called the Heath Home?" asked Dot.

"That is open to the same objection. You may call it the Heath House if you like, and it stands then like any one of a multitude of small hotels or boarding-houses. The very name will not then suggest that the girl who finds a home there is the recipient of a bounty."

"Well, that is a good name surely," said Mrs. Warren, who was passing through the room. "The Heath House—I think your father will like it."

"And what do you think, auntie, of our giving each one of the ten bedrooms the name of a girl in our art class?"



“Quite a pretty thought. Then each one would feel that the room bearing her name should be her special care.”

“We ought to have furnished them, then,” said Grace; “but we could still superintend their furnishing, and supply all the dainty and pretty little things.”

“All that you would or could make with your own hands you could supply,” said Margaret. “You could, also, feel the room to be your own, and have some choice as to its occupants, whenever vacancies occur. If we name the rooms, I should pass all care of them, or thought about them, over to you.”

“But there are only ten bedrooms,” said Bella.

“That is just the right number, girls,” answered Margaret; “for I cannot go to look after one, nor can our feeble friend Stella do it. So you must leave us out.”

“But the room which you said we could use as a chapel, surely that ought to be dedicated to our saint.”

And though Margaret demurred, they called it “St. Margaret’s Chapel” from that day.



## CHAPTER IX.

It was a very fair picture that greeted the eyes of the visitor at Heath House, on a bright morning, a week after this meeting. In the upper floors all was in a state of busy preparation, for to-night the six new occupants were to come. In one room sat six women, all as tidy as their faded frocks would allow, all sewing away at the sheets and curtains. These were being prepared by Grace and Ruth, whose faces shone brightly above the billows of white muslin that fell from their laps and overflowed the floor. There was much talk in an undertone among the women, and much notice taken of half-a-dozen babies, who sat tied in little high chairs, pounding the table with their tiny fists, or crept about the rugs at the feet of the women, who talked to them and smiled at them as they worked. On a couch at the back of the room two little ones lay asleep.

These children belonged to the *crèche* already established, which furnished room for six children, whose mothers were out at work by the day. For the present, their attendant was a poor mother, a convalescent from the hospital, sent there by the



sickness that followed the death of both her own little ones. She had lost them through the poison of the atmosphere in the crowded tenement-house, where one dingy room—devoid of sun and fresh air, steeped in the miasma of bad drainage—had been her only home. And, now that her poor body had crept back to life, they felt that in no way could they win life back to her desolate heart, but to fill her days with the loving, tender mother-care for these little ones.

The house was overfull to-day, so the sewing women shared the nursery. And every woman of this group had been invited to see Margaret once; had been up to that still chamber where she lay in her arm-chair; had heard her voice, and felt the touch of her wonderful hand; and told her, one by one, “just because they couldn’t help it,” the story of their trials and hopes and fears. And every one went down from the place willing to do for the beautiful sufferer whatever she could ask or wish. They were her friends for life, these hard-working, weary women; made so by the touch, the look, and the voice of a woman, who preached them no sermons, gave them no chapter of good advice; but who felt their burden and pain, and really grieved that life for them was so hard.

So, when the Heath House sewing was done, Margaret brought their needs before her girls; and here-



after these same women, and many others, continued to come one afternoon in a week to sew. Only now they did not sew for money, but for themselves. The society of girls bought the materials, and taught each woman to make them into the articles most needed for her family or her home. She made them herself, and also sewed, on similar work, enough to pay for the material. The overwork made a surplus of garments, and these were sold on a certain day of every month, to servants, to working-girls, to people not too poor to buy, at prices only slightly in advance of the cost of material.

Thus, little by little, the women saw new quilts, bed linen, table linen, and garments supplying the place of rags and dirt; and cheerfully, when their own families were supplied, they came and worked out the cost of material. So the circle widened always; and usually when they worked some one of the girls read to them, and sometimes Bellina came and sang; or they were all invited into the chapel to hear explained the work of the training school, or to be told how to nurse the sick; to prepare food for the feeble; to make a little money go a long way in furnishing comfort; how to choose nutritious food; and, best of all, how to prepare it.

For services like these, Mrs. Warren was always able to find competent ladies, who would undertake



to instruct for an hour; and in course of time these audiences of humble women overflowed the little chapel, and stood around the doors, and had to be transferred to an evening hour. Ultimately, it grew to be a regular thing, that every week in the winter there should be, in "St. Margaret's Hall," something in the way of healthful instruction or entertainment for women and working-girls.

All went prosperously from the start with the training-school, the only problem being that of how to provide for the great number who were constantly applying for places, in what the girls still laughingly called the "Life-class."

As soon as it was known that the Heath House was really intended for orphans or destitute children, the applicants became so numerous that the six girls, happy in their neat little rooms, knew they must give up their places. Before it came to that, Margaret summoned her council of girls, and divided among them the list of sixty names which she had received in answer to her advertisement for a few girls who desired a home, and asked her friends to write for each of these an invitation to pass an evening at Heath House, and to bring as many other girls as they knew who would be interested in a project for establishing boarding-houses for homeless working-girls.



“Our girls are going to be crowded out by the orphans,” observed Margaret, “and I cannot send them back to the life they have lived: I want to see them all together, these girls from the various parts of the city. I want to know whether, as a class, they really desire a home, or a number of homes, where they shall be clean, comfortable, and protected; whether such homes would really be occupied by them, in preference to all others, at the same rates which they now pay. Then, I want my father and a few of his own and auntie’s friends and your parents, with any friends they may choose to bring, to meet with us. You, my dear girls, shall be the hostesses; you shall sing for them, and some of us will read some selections, grave or humorous. You can easily arrange all that. There shall be a little refreshment, and some talk. They shall have a pleasant evening, and when they are gone we will listen to what our older friends think of a plan for starting a boarding-home for girls.”

With so many helpers the preparations were soon made; and when the evening came Margaret was driven to the home, and her arm-chair placed in a corner near the platform, where she could hear all that was said and see the whole circle of faces of these girls, whose welfare lay so heavily upon her heart.



What thoughts stirred her as she sat and watched, while their faces softened under Bella's music, or brightened under the reading of some amusing rhyme, I will not attempt to say; but, if ever heart throbbed with good-will to men, hers did in that waiting hour. And when it was all over, and the various groups had scattered, walking off by twos and threes into the darkness, not one without having first heard Margaret's cordial tones, and felt the pressure of her hand, she turned eagerly to her father, and said:

"Now, dear papa, you have seen them, and know what it is we are thinking about. Please call the friends together, and decide what we can do to help these girls!"

For the next hour they talked—discussing the need, the evil of their present homes, and the blessed influences that might radiate from homes like the one proposed—and it ended by a decision that a house should be leased, one of a new row in an inexpensive but accessible quarter, and passed over into the hands of the "Fair Half-dozen" for the experiment they desired. This was all Margaret asked, and more than she hoped.

We must pass over hastily the preparations for occupancy, which were made in part by inducing friends to furnish a room. Mrs. Warren was very



helpful again, lending from her country house many articles that they must otherwise have bought.

It was done at last. Its corps of servants were selected from the women who had been furnished with temporary homes on their removal from the hospitals. It was, in fact, only a larger training-school, as Margaret arranged that certain branches of household work should there be practically taught to any whom she might choose to send. The mother of Stella White became its matron, and Stella came down from her attic window to a sunny room in the new house, whose bay window she kept full of plants and flowers. Every living bit of greenness that she touched seemed to thrive and grow; and as there was a sunny court at the rear of the house, and Margaret felt that Stella's life depended upon the fresh air, she placed it in her charge, with instructions to cultivate there all the flowers she could, and to induce the various inmates of the house, as fast as they came, to choose each some plant for her own, and to watch its nurture and growth. In this way Margaret thought each girl, however isolated and forlorn, would have some little thing that made the place seem home, and she knew that Stella would let no girl's blossom die for want of care.

If she thought, also, that Stella's most beautiful spirit, as it came thus in direct contact with every



girl's heart, would be sure to nourish all the purest things therein, she was not far from right; for a sweeter spirit than Stella's, or one that ripened more blessedly for heaven, was rarely seen.

And when the home was ready, and they threw it open to the girls, Queen Margaret's heart knew but one regretful pang—it would only hold one third of those who wanted to come in.



## CHAPTER X.

No sooner was the new house in successful operation than one of its members, an overworked and half-fed operator on the sewing-machine, fell ill. Should she go to a hospital? Margaret, knowing the fear of contagion, caused the matter to be laid before the inmates of the house. Ruth went down to represent Margaret, met the girls in the parlor as they came up from tea, and told them the sick girl, a stranger to most of them, could not be taken from their midst. Had she fallen ill elsewhere, she said, "she must have gone to a hospital. But Miss Heath says that when people fall ill at home, their friends do not send them away if it can be avoided. This is a home; we are of one family here, and should we not keep and care for our own?"

The little murmur of assent that ran around the room was sufficient answer.

"Very well, then, you have decided. You may each know that, if ill, you can be ill here at home, instead of in a hospital, unless there is some contagious disease. We will set apart two sunny rooms, one for poor Nellie Jones, and one adjoining for a



nurse, whom we will have here to-morrow. Who among you will see that Nellie is cared for to-night?"

And so many voices answered "I will!" that Ruth smiled, and said:

"I must leave the selection to Mrs. White. I am sure, if she needs it, there will be no lack of help."

On the morrow the nurse, found and recommended by Ruth, came. She was an elderly woman, with a fresh, bright face, and kindly blue eyes. Her silver hair was nearly hidden by her Quaker cap, and, across her gray dress, the muslin handkerchief lay in softest folds. She was the dear old Quaker dame who had been comforted in her illness so long ago by the presence of a bright young face and the daily gifts of flowers. She was like a kind, cheery grandmother sent in among these girls; and more than one of them thought she would not unwillingly be taken ill that she might lie in that soft, white bed, and be tended by those gentle hands. Ruth had never forgotten her, and was quite right in believing her motherly presence would be a blessing in more ways than one.

It was hardly to be expected that the various plans for helping others to help themselves should long progress without the workers coming in contact with



persons who would not, or persons who could not, be helped.

Not all the poor women who, from time to time, came to their sewing-school, proved eager to do their best; not all their young girls were of the grateful and appreciative sort; not all the children of the training-school were steadily ready to improve. Human nature in the poor is no grander, as a whole, than it is in the rich, though we act as if we expected it to be. Margaret had many cases of discontent and suspicion, of indolence and cupidity, of selfish longing to get the most aid with the smallest effort. Patience and abundant grace were needed for the ever-recurring problem of how to help without demoralizing the poor; but, even with many drawbacks, the work went hopefully on.

And all these sources of anxiety perplexed Margaret less than one great cause of distress that never was out of her mind. No one of the malcontents puzzled and disturbed her as did Crystal, the one whom she had taken into her home and her heart. Sometimes she almost doubted her own personal influence for good, when she remembered that Crystal had lived by her side for months without being won to open her heart to her. It was not that Crystal was careless as to any of the light duties laid upon her. Even in the work for the poor, she took her



part; but, from the first, Margaret noticed that she neither cared to hear nor to speak of the class of people from which she herself had sprung. She listened, if she must; but she never responded, and never by word or look betrayed any interest in the poor; always conveying by her silence her conviction that all effort in their behalf was vain. Very bitter, Margaret felt her experiences must have been, to produce so hard a spirit in one so young. She often betrayed her unwillingness to go to Heath House, and even begged to be excused from taking her turn as visitor among the poor. If this had been all, her friend would have felt that the painful memories of her childhood had created in her an unhealthy condition of mind; but Crystal had a way of absenting herself sometimes for an hour or two longer than could have been taken by the errands on which she was sent; and when questioned, would give no explanation of her delay.

One day Ruth, who was an indefatigable little visitor among the poor, sat telling Margaret of her experience, both amusing and discouraging, when Crystal came in from a walk.

“Ah, here you are!” Ruth said, rising with a look of honest admiration to greet the beautiful girl, whose face was radiant with the glow from the fresh air. “I saw you at the corner of North Street, as I



was going to take some fruit to poor little Jerry McCord; and I hastened to overtake you, that we might walk back together. But you vanished so quickly out of my sight, that I could not tell which of those wretched dwellings you entered. Whom have you on your list in North Street, may I ask?"

A quick flush mounted to Crystal's forehead as she glanced at Margaret's face, but she answered, promptly:

"I have no one in North Street on my list, Miss Nelson. My walk this morning was quite in another direction. I had some work to take for Miss Heath to West Tenth Street."

"And you mean to tell me you were not in North Street at all? that I did not see you talking with an old woman on the corner—a woman with a shawl over her head? Then you must have a twin-sister, or I have seen your double."

Margaret lifted her eyes appealingly to Crystal, as if to beg her to confide in her; but Crystal colored angrily, and said,

"Miss Nelson has a vivid imagination; I did not know any one resembled me so closely."

That night, as Margaret was about retiring, she drew Crystal to her side, and said,

"You are not happy here, my dear girl; something



troubles you. Are you sure it is nothing in which I can help you?"

For a moment Crystal looked ready to cry; but she dashed the tears away, and said, in an excited manner,

"No, Miss Margaret; no one can help me. There is no help for girls like me."

"And why, my child? Think how many girls we have helped."

"They were not like me," said Crystal, bitterly; "they had nothing to drag them down. If they tried to be better they could be so."

"And cannot you, too, Crystal? Can you not trust me? You seem to me like one living in constant fear."

"And so I am, Miss Margaret," she broke forth, vehemently; "I am in fear that I shall lose you, that you will send me away;" and she turned abruptly and went sobbing from the room.

Not many days after this Mrs. Warren came into Margaret's room as she was resting after her morning class, saying, gently,

"Are you tired, dear, or trying to sleep? If not, I want to talk with you a little while."

"I'm never too tired for conversation with you, dear auntie."

"Well, dear, you have become a woman with so



many children and such serious cares, that I shrink from bringing you mine; and yet I am so anxious about a little matter, that I am going to confide it to you."

Margaret drew herself higher on the pillows, and, patting her aunt's hand affectionately, looked inquiringly into her eyes.

"You know the upper drawer of my dressing bureau, Margaret, has been used by me as a receptacle for small sums of money, and, one day, a fortnight ago, contrary to custom, I left a gold piece of twenty dollars. Later in the same day I had need of it, and, to my surprise, when I went for it I found it was not there. I searched carefully; the silver pieces were as I left them, but some one had certainly taken the gold. I chided myself for my carelessness in thus placing temptation in any one's way, and, not knowing whom among the servants to suspect, tried not to let my mind fasten upon any one. And now comes the sequel."

Margaret held her aunt's hand very tightly, but never answered a word.

"This morning I had occasion to go to the same drawer, and there, in the very place from which it was taken, lay the gold, not the same bright piece, but one tarnished and worn. Conscience has evidently been at work in the mind of the thief, and the



money has been returned. Now, who took it? and who brought it back?"

"I do not know; I cannot guess!" said Margaret, nevertheless, a suspicion that made her faint and ill took possession of her mind.

Could Crystal have done this? If so, what use had she for the money? Was this the secret of her unrest? A hundred conflicting thoughts passed through her mind, the foremost the desire to shield and save the girl. Before she had spoken, a rap came to the door.

"Mrs. Warren," said the servant, "the grocer's boy has come to return this five-dollar note, and to say that it is not good."

"But why does he send it here?" she asked, taking the money from his hand.

He says, please, that it was sent round yesterday by one of the maids, with three others, to be changed for a double-eagle. His new clerk took it in without detecting it, and he would like you to be so good as to change it for another."

"But there is some mistake," said Mrs. Warren, still holding the discarded note in her hand.

"No, perhaps not, dear auntie," broke in Margaret, abruptly. "Let me see it; I both received and paid out money yesterday, and it is quite possible it went from here. Yes," taking it in her hand, "here is a



spot of ink which dropped from my pen as the money lay here on my desk. Please pay the boy, auntie, and thank him for showing me the error."

And her aunt sent the servant away, and turned and kissed Margaret without a word. None the less she saw the eyes filled with tears, and the quiver of the lip, and the trembling of the hands, and knew she was feeling the sting of ingratitude, and the hurt of having been deceived.

Little sleep visited Margaret's eyes that night. Somehow, think of it as she would, she could but chide herself. She had taken the girl, giving her a home, but had forgotten what a temptation such rare beauty must make to purchase pretty clothes. She had even thought the girl singularly free from vanity; but, evidently, she had not been able to wait for her wages. Certainly, the five-dollar note was a part of the payment made to Crystal only two days before. Naturally she thought the girl desired finery; if so, then she had a lover, and that would explain the long absence, the self-absorbed manner, and all the rest. What course to take, how to save her, was now the problem. All Margaret's theories came to naught under this experiment. She had said:

"Let us give homes to the homeless, love them,



care for them, and the dark shadows of evil in their natures will flee before the light."

She had tried it, and this was the result. Now, what more could be done? Fortunately, she did not have to answer the question, for a timid knock came in the early morning at her door, and Crystal came stealing softly to her side.



## CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET started up hurriedly in bed, and involuntarily opened her arms. It was not at all the thing she meant to do; but the impulse of pity in her was too strong.

With a cry of distress Crystal threw herself by the bedside, and buried her face in the pillow, while Margaret gently passed her hand over the golden hair, trying to quiet her sobs. When she found her voice she broke forth, raining passionate kisses on Margaret's hands between her words,

"I was going away, Miss Margaret. In the night I packed all the things you ever gave me, and wrote a note to leave with them for you. I have been meaning to go away for a long time, for I knew I was not fit to be here near you; but I would not go till I had earned enough to give the money back."

Margaret tightened her grasp upon her hands, and whispered,

"I am so glad, Crystal—so glad you did put it back."

"Did you know I had it?" asked Crystal.

"Not until yesterday; then I knew, and I have



been thinking about it all night. O! Crystal; why did you not tell me you needed money? Why could you not trust me? Surely you knew I would have been your friend?"

"Don't, Miss Margaret—please don't say any thing more like that. Never girl had such a friend as you! I meant to leave you last night, but I could not go without telling you how I loved you; I could not go without telling you the truth."

"Then let me have it now," said Margaret, lifting Crystal's head and looking her straight in the face; "tell me what tempted you, my child."

Crystal dropped her eyes; but her voice ceased to tremble after she had once begun.

"Do you remember, Miss Margaret, when I first came here, that one of the girls told you of a woman who deceived her, and sold the roses for whisky? Do you remember that she said she had a child, and that she would seek the whole world over to find her? Well, Miss Margaret, I was the daughter she was seeking; that wretched creature was my mother. I had known with her a childhood too horrible to tell. She sold my clothing, even the shoes from my feet, in midwinter, for whisky. I think"—and her voice sank low in shame—"that she would have sold myself; but I ran away. I got a place to learn to dance, through another girl; I roomed with that girl, and



managed to keep out of her sight, till I was hurt and sent to the hospital. Then I came here. It was heaven. All I had known before was hell. I had one terror, that something else would be found for me to do, and that I should be sent away. When you spoke of little Biddy Dolan, I feared I should be sent to her, and her home was near my mother's old haunts."

Margaret passed her hand softly over the golden hair when the voice faltered, and encouraged her to go on.

"It happened as I feared," she added, shuddering. "One morning you sent me with fruit for little Biddy, and, turning a corner, I saw my mother, and she saw me; I darted into the house, but she waited for me. When I came out she attacked me with the roughest abuse. She threatened to hand me over to the police; and I told her that I had been in the hospital, and was now at service; and I told her, if she followed me to your house, I should be sent away; but if she would not try to find out where I was, I would bring her all I earned.

"She promised. She told me where she lived, and I went there whenever I had money, knowing she spent it in drink. Three weeks ago I found her sober. She wanted me to come back to her. I told her I would never do it. She then said that if she



could get the money to pay her passage she would go home to Ireland, where she has other children. She was a widow when she married my father, who died when I was a little child. I cannot tell you, Miss Margaret, what a relief that opened to me. If only I could get the money—and I feared if I waited that she would change her mind. I wanted to ask you, but I could not tell you of her, and every time I tried the words choked me.”

There was a pause, broken only by the sobs of the stricken girl.

“Well, my poor child, I suppose I know the rest.”

“Yes,” answered Crystal. “Only I never meant to get it in that way, until the moment the dreadful thing was done. Mrs. Warren sent me to the drawer for something. I saw the gold; I could add to it what I already had, and it would pay her passage. I took it to her. I bade her good-bye. I came back, and went to work to earn and replace the money. I did it yesterday, Miss Margaret, and then I packed my things, and I was going away.”

“But where, my child, and why? Did you think I would send you away for the theft?”

Crystal shivered at the word.

“Not you, Miss Margaret. O no, not you; I thought Mrs. Warren might, and of course you could never trust me again; but—”



“But what, Crystal?”

“I have to go, any way,” she answered, wearily; “for yesterday, when I went out on my errands, she was waiting for me at the area gate. She had deceived me. She had not meant to go; she had followed me that very day when I thought I had bidden her good-bye forever; and now she threatened to go to the lady of the house and demand her child. She will do it, Miss Margaret; she will come and make herself known to all the servants; she will watch for me constantly, and even accost your father in the street. The only way to save you all is for me to go away.”

“But where will you go, my poor girl? What will you do?”

“I will go out into the country, Miss Margaret. She will find me at the Heath House; she will find me at the Home for girls. I can never work in the city that she will not find me out. There is no chance in the world for girls whose parents are given to drink. And yet, and yet, Miss Margaret, all the shame and all the trouble are nothing to the shame of having deceived you, and abused your trust. I am as bad as she is, and worse, for the whisky takes away her power to do right.”

“All that is partly true,” said Margaret, gravely. “There has been a good deal of wrong in your effort



to bear this trouble, and some time we will talk it all out, and then leave it behind forever. God never makes it impossible to do right, Crystal. We must remember that. Now, for the present, I am going to dismiss the wrong-doing from my mind."

Crystal grasped her hands eagerly.

"Yes, dear, I forgive you and I trust you; and I am going to protect you, too. Now, go away, and undo all your preparations for leaving. Later in the day I will say what I want you to do. Meantime, come and stay in my room every moment that other duties do not call you. I want to keep you very near me to-day.

There was a long, sweet talk with Mrs. Warren in Margaret's room that morning; and it was decided that Mrs. Warren should make no allusion to Crystal's fault. But they had not read the girl aright. The foundations of grateful feeling once stirred, she could be satisfied with no half-confession. She sought Mrs. Warren herself, and in broken tones acknowledged her sin, offering no word of explanation or excuse.

"I saw it there, Mrs. Warren, and I wanted it, and took it. I know how wrong it was, and I am willing to be sent away or to bear any thing you think best."

"I am so sorry for it all, my child," Mrs. Warren said, kindly; "but I have left it with Margaret. She



will do what she thinks best. I can trust you if she can ; I am sure no such thing could ever occur again ;” and the tears were in her eyes, as the shame-crimsoned face was withdrawn from the room.

The next day was the day for the talk on art. Crystal was present, pale and grave, but with a countenance from which all the hard, defiant look had passed away. Margaret asked the girls to come together on the following morning, as she had something of importance to communicate to them, and would like also to give an hour to hearing the reports of the various departments of their work.

So once more they came around the large library table, and the visitors among the poor gave accounts of their success. The committee on the *crèche* reported on the welfare of the babies, the gratitude of the mothers, and the increased cheerfulness of the one poor mother who was learning to bear her own pitiful loss by the help of these little ones. The orphanage department had its full complement of children, and Lucy told of the many poor children from outside who joined them in the kindergarten hours.

Fair reports came in from the training-school. The condition of Heath House, its perfect neatness and order, the well-cooked food, the careful service—all would speak for themselves of the value of proper



training in domestic matters to the comfort of a home. And the improvement in the homes of those trained, the record of the few girls already fitted for service, testified to the value of the training to the girls. Little Guido was the pet of the house, and as happy as a king, and his voice promised to make a leader by and by for the chapel choir. His mother sang at St. Margaret's Chapel every Sunday evening, and, because of the boy, had a room at Heath House; and pupils enough had come to her, through Margaret's friends, to make a comfortable support. She was also interested in the music at the boarding-home, and, with Bellina's help, tried to train the voices there, adding greatly to the delight of their leisure hours.

The talks to women and girls still proved to be of the greatest use, and one kind lady and another stood ready to support this work.

As for the hospital visiting, confined always to the convalescent wards of women and children, it had grown into a joy to the girls who undertook it, as well as to the sufferers, who learned to look for the kind voices and faces as much as for the flowers they brought. The ladies who received the convalescents, some of them, furnished a room, and paid their board at the Girls' Home; and some continued to make a place in their own households, sending the sufferers



forth to some new life, renewed by the spirit of kindness in courage and faith, as well as restored to bodily health. Flowers still went to the sick poor, and books and papers also, such as were adapted to the sufferers' needs.

And Margaret listened to all, and then she asked the girls how many of them were happier and richer in their lives for the work they had to do? And there was but one answer. And then she asked if their own proper home or social lives suffered by the work which they had tried to do, systematized as it was, so that it should take not more than two afternoons a week from any one? Again the answer came unhesitatingly that, as to health of body, mind, and soul, they were better, every one.

"Well, that being true," Margaret said, "I have one more little project that will, I am sure, commend itself to you. Our success in the outward working of all the others is marked; but our real success is the amount of good that comes through these agencies to our own characters, and to the character of others. And our real work is not to watch the running of our machinery alone, but to watch for signs of fruit in individual lives, not only to help one that we may reach many, but to help many that we may reach one.



“Now we are all right, so far as we have gone, as to our work in the city; but I want a country summer home, where our orphans may run and play during the summer heats; where our working-girls may spend their two weeks of holiday; where our invalids may get a breath of fresh air. Such a home has, by the death of her brother, come into the hands of our dear old Quaker nurse. She cannot live there alone, though the old farm is dear to her. She will come to our girls, when any one is ill, but we can use her house for our purpose, renting it at an astonishingly low rate; and she will be there to mother us, except when we have sickness in town. It is not a very large place. It will not hold all in whom we are interested, at once; but, by proper division of occupants and time, we can all get our breath of country air, and a few weeks among the hills. And I want to propose,” she added, “that some day, when we all feel stronger, we shall take the train, and go there to spend the night, and look over the ground. It may prove also to be the place for our nursery, to start the plants to be grown in the houses of the poor.”

“Can you go, too?” asked Ruth, pleadingly.

“I think I might, if the dear nurse was there, and could keep the weaker ones of us overnight.”

It was early May when they had this talk, and a



little later, when the apple-trees were in bloom, the trip was made. Never a happier party of young girls than that which drove in through the wide-swung gates, and descended at the vine-covered porch of the old farm-house.

The nurse was there, in her muslin kerchief and Quaker cap, happy as any grandmother whose children had come home to spend Thanksgiving. Margaret had not told the girls that the dear old lady had decided to leave the home, in her will, to the uses of the work proposed.

What a merry day they had! And, at night, when all had taken the train back to the city, except Margaret and Crystal, they two sat alone in the moon-light porch.

“Do you not think it a peaceful and restful spot, Crystal?” said Margaret, drawing Crystal’s hand within her own.

“O yes, so restful, and—and”—drawing a long breath—“one feels so safe! I would like to stay here always with you!”

“And without me, Crystal; would you not stay without me, if the house needed you, and you could do here my work that I am not strong enough to do?”

For a moment the girl’s face flushed, and her eyes filled with tears.



"I know you told me the one thing you dreaded was to be sent away. I will never send you away. I love instead to have you near me, and shall miss you sorely from my side. But this place needs you. Its inmates will need an older sister, as well as the little Quaker mother. I would like to be that older sister, if I might, and I would be here often with you. The little room on the balcony is to be called mine. Could you not take it, and do, for my sake, for all who come here, as you think I would do. It will be a beautiful work; and you, dear Crystal, are going to find peace and forgetfulness only in doing some noble work. Are you not eager to begin?"

And Crystal's head bowed lower and lower, and a tender rain of tears fell on Margaret's hand. A long silence followed, and Margaret knew the dear girl was having her hardest lesson. On the one hand, what she wanted; on the other, what she ought to do. It did not last long. When she lifted up her face, it was bright and strong.

"I have chosen," she whispered, "and, Miss Margaret, if I try all I can to save and help those who come here, perhaps some one will be able to save and help my mother yet."

"Perhaps. God grant it!" said Margaret, solemnly.

And so, in the spirit in which Crystal's choice was



made, the work began, and, in harmony with all the other work, went on to bless. And the years bore fruit, until more souls than can be counted—until the records of heaven are read—bore on, into the eternal years, the mark of the life and effort of this “fair half-dozen” girls.

THE END.



































**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**



00014734478